

The cover of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Review magazine features a vibrant collage of protest-related images. At the top left, the 'asr' logo is prominently displayed in white on a red background. Below it, the magazine's title and issue information are listed. The central and right portions of the cover are filled with various photographs of protesters, including individuals wearing hard hats, a woman in a 'LOCAL 48' t-shirt, and a person holding a 'WHITE SILENCE' sign. A large, bold headline is superimposed over the middle of the collage, and several smaller text boxes provide additional context or article titles. The overall aesthetic is one of active social and political engagement.

# asr

ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST REVIEW  
#71/72 FALL 2017 \$6.00

## IN THIS ISSUE: UNIONS AGAINST FASCISM

Lessons from  
Germany  
& Italy

Flying  
Squads  
& Self-  
Defense

TRADESWOMEN  
AGAINST TYRANNY

WHITE  
SILENCE  
IS  
COMPLIANCE  
WITH  
WHITE  
VIOLENCE

LOCAL 48  
INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS  
APPROVED BY THE ILO  
ESTABLISHED 1891

"WORKERISM" & COMMUNITY-LABOR ALLIANCES IN SOUTH AFRICA  
160 YEARS OF "LIBERTARIAN" • PLAYFUL ANARCHISM • ANTHROPOCENE



## **Industrial Workers of the World Preamble** (as amended 1908)

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people, and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease to work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all. Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

## **Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism**

(EXTRACTS) Adopted December 1922 by the

Berlin Congress of the International Workers Association (AIT)

- I. Revolutionary Syndicalism, basing itself on the class struggle, seeks to establish the unity and solidarity of all manual and intellectual workers into economic organizations fighting for the abolition of both the wage system and the State. Neither the State nor political parties can achieve the economic organization and emancipation of labor.
- II. Revolutionary Syndicalism maintains that economic and social monopolies must be replaced by free, self-managed federations of agricultural and industrial workers united in a system of councils.
- III. The two-fold task of Revolutionary Syndicalism is to carry on the daily struggle for economic, social and intellectual improvement in the existing society, and to achieve independent self-managed production and distribution by taking possession of the earth and the means of production. Instead of the State and political parties, the economic organization of labor. Instead of government over people, the administration of things.
- IV. Revolutionary Syndicalism is based on the principles of federalism, free agreement and grassroots organization from the base upwards into local, district, regional and international federations united by shared aspirations and common interests.
- V. Revolutionary Syndicalism rejects nationalism, the religion of the State, and all arbitrary frontiers, recognizing only the self-rule of natural communities freely enjoying their own way of life, constantly enriched by the benefits of free association with other federated communities.
- VI. Revolutionary Syndicalism, basing itself on economic direct action, supports all struggles not in contradiction with its principles – the strike, the boycott, the sit-in, and other forms of direct action developed by the workers in the course of their struggles leading to labor's most effective weapon, the General Strike, prelude to social revolution.

## **ASR & the Challenges Facing the Syndicalist Movement**

Several ASR editorial collective members met July 22, for our first face-to-face meeting in several years. We talked about working to include more topical articles about what is going on in the labor movement and expanding ASR's online presence (something that would require assistance from supporters with technical expertise). Although we are committed to continue publishing historical articles and reviews, the balance has shifted too far in this direction in recent issues. We need more articles on tactics and strategies for building strong syndicalist movements today, on the challenges posed by corporate globalization, labor and other social "reforms," and the increasingly precarious nature of work. We need more writers, especially women, young people, and anarcho-syndicalists who are active in non-English speaking countries. We need reviewers, translators and artists. If you can help, let me know.

In addition to our website, ASR maintains an increasingly active FaceBook page. We are working to revamp our email newsletter (technical obstacles are blocking it from reaching most subscribers, and so we need to develop a new platform).

As this issue went to press we had received \$664.54 in subscriptions since our last issue, and spent \$1,929.18 on printing, postage, website and bank fees. Generous donations to our Publication Fund brought in \$1,306, bringing total income to \$1,910.54 – or \$18.64 less than expenses. As a result, our cumulative deficit increased slightly to \$689.28. Your continued assistance in reducing this long-standing debt is needed and appreciated.

Our thanks to the following for their generous contributions to the ASR Publication Fund: Mike Jenkins, St. Anthony \$100; David Hopp \$25; P.C. Jacobs, Mattapoisett \$10; Mike Long \$150; Peter Wilkin, Lille \$10; Robert Ratynski, S. Amboy \$15; Mark Rothe, New York \$700; James Herod, Cambridge \$80; Joseph Morris, Portland \$50; Raymond Solomon, Rego Park \$40; Scott Sullivan, Bardonia \$50; Eric Chester, Glasgow \$16; Martin Comack, Somerville \$10; Bob Reilly, Pine \$50.

There are too few places where ASR is available, limiting the effectiveness of this conversation. Why not take a bundle or ask your local bookstore to carry ASR? We can supply copies directly, to you, or through our distributors.

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Letters, articles, reviews and responses to articles published in ASR are always welcome. The copy deadline for #71 is Aug. 20, 2017. (If articles can be submitted electronically in .rtf, .doc or similar format, this would be appreciated.)

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ASR, P.O. Box 42531, Philadelphia PA 19101 USA

anarchosyndicalistreview@gmail.com www.syndicalist.us

Exchanges: ASR, c/o Mike Hargis, 937 Sherman Ave., Evanston IL 60202



## A golden age for workers?

The front page of the Sept. 20 *New York Times*' Business Day section has headlines suggesting that workers are doing well, but when you read the stories things look quite different.

Eduardo Porter's column headline trumpets "Labor Shortage Gives Workers an Edge." It takes him until the fourth graf to tell us that average hourly pay for production and non-supervisory workers has almost returned to 1973 levels (after adjusting for inflation). Less, of course, after 44 years of speed-ups, but close. Of course, that doesn't take account of lost benefits. We're paying a lot more out of pocket for our health care. Time off is harder to get. Pension plans are but a distant memory. And right next door, "Cost of Employer-Based Plans Remains Stable, a Study Finds."

Good news, right? Well, it's good news for the bosses. Average premiums for family coverage are up 3 percent, to \$18,764 a year. The cost is rising faster than wages, and far fewer small employers are offering health benefits at all. Out-of-pocket costs are higher, as employers switch to insurance plans that restrict access to doctors



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and hospitals. But "deductibles rose only slightly this year." Why? "Companies are recognizing that they have reached the limits of what they can ask their workers to pay, said Michael Thompson, the chief executive of the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, which represents employers. 'We're running out of runway to keep cost-shifting to employees,' he said."

But at least we're seeing the promise of new jobs? The same page's "A Manufacturing Model Tough to Export" notes that FoxConn, which is promising 13,000 new jobs in Wisconsin, has a history of breaking such promises once it gets its government hand-outs. In Brazil, FoxConn promised nearly 100,000 jobs in exchange for billions in subsidies. Six years later, the plant site sits empty – only 2,800 jobs ever materialized. In Pennsylvania, FoxConn promised years ago to hire 500 workers for a \$30 million plant it has yet to break ground on.

Wisconsin officials have promised \$3 billion in tax breaks and other subsidies. If FoxConn hires all the workers it promises, it would take until 2042 before the state could hope to recoup its money. (Of course, the deal would have run out by then, and so FoxConn would have long since demanded more payments.)

Back to the looming labor shortage. Employers profess to be worried that they're going to run out of workers (though there are tens of millions of folks frozen out of the labor market – far more than the jobs employers say they can't fill). The *Times* quotes "experts" who suggest slashing disability benefits, expanding government assistance for workers paid so little they can't afford childcare or rent, and holding down the minimum wage because higher wages "could price some workers out of jobs" even in the face of the "looming labor shortage" the column frets about.

Over in Arts, the same issue reviews *Nomadland*, about tens of thousands of workers forced to trade in their homes for vans and old school buses, traveling in search of part-time jobs – sometimes working for little more than a place to park. Their ranks include "retired" teachers and aged-out software engineers. Amazon hires lots of these desperate workers, getting federal tax credits for 25-40 percent of the paltry wages it pays them for working in dangerous sweatshops where the company distributes free painkillers to keep them working as long, and as fast, as possible.

## Economic Immobility

A recent study by UC Berkeley economist Jesse Rothstein finds that it is increasingly difficult for Americans born to poor and working-class households to progress economically. Few will make it to the "middle class," however defined, and the rags to riches story is just that – a fairy tale.

Pundits and polytricksters love to tell us that the route to prosperity lies in hard work (that's why you see the poor working 12-hour days while the rich lounge in their mansions and country clubs) and education. But education and advanced training accounts for only a fraction of income disparities. Much more significant, Rothstein notes, are social factors: "higher minimum wages, the presence and strength of labor unions, and clear career pathways within local industries."

Meanwhile, nearly one in five children in America live in poverty, according to 2017 census data. (The situation is slightly improved by programs such as food stamps, although these figures



are based on bare bones budgets that do not reflect the real costs of living in most cities.) But corporate profits are skyrocketing, and Congress is hard at work on a big tax cut for the super-rich.

## **U.S. Hit on Labor Rights Issues**

In the NAFTA renegotiations, the Canadian government is demanding that the U.S. adopt real labor protections, including ending so-called “right to work” laws and other barriers to workers exercising their right to unionize, in order to bring an end to unfair conditions that unfairly advantage U.S. employers.

And former Mexican President Vicente Fox, himself a right-winger (at least in the Mexican context; U.S. politicians are so timid these days that most “Democrats” are afraid to raise policies historically backed by Republicans for fear of being red-baited), is offering lessons to Donald Trump on how to resist the temptation to blow up the world. “It’s a very nice world,” he says – and it could be if we organized to free it of parasites and grifters.

## **Court to Workers: Be Loyal to the Boss**

On July 3, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit, overturned a NLRB ruling, previously upheld by a three-judge panel, that a Jimmy John’s sandwich shop improperly fired workers for hanging posters at work challenging the company’s sick-leave policy. That policy requires sick workers to find their own replacement, and docks their pay. When managers removed workplace posters suggesting that this policy forced workers to work sick, IWW activists put up copies throughout the Minneapolis-St. Paul region.

Six workers were fired for posting the flyers, and three others issued written warnings. The National Labor Relations Board ruled that this was protected concerted activity aimed at improving working conditions, and ordered that the workers be reinstated. The Eighth Circuit overturned that order, ruling that even though the speech was true (the judges claim it was ‘materially false,’ but every fact in the poster was indisputably true) and related to an ongoing labor dispute, the campaign was designed to inflict harm on the company’s reputation and reduce its income. And so, once again, we see that workers have no rights that bosses are obliged to respect – except those we enforce through our own direct action.

## **Longer Hours**

A Labor Dept. rule extending overtime pay to low-paid workers misclassified as “managers” or “professionals” in order to force them to put in 60, 70 or 80 hours a week without compensation (often falling below minimum wage rates in the process) has been struck down by a federal judge. The judge in the case was appointed by Obama, which just goes to show that if there’s one thing Democrats and Republicans agree on, it’s screwing workers.

## **La Migra Aids Criminal Bosses**

The *Los Angeles Times* reports that federal immigration agents have shown up at least twice at California labor dispute proceedings to seize undocumented workers. The state Labor Commissioner’s Office said that since Trump’s election ICE agents showed up at hearings in Van Nuys and Santa Ana looking for workers who had brought wage theft claims against their employers.

In January, ICE contacted a state official asking for details about an ongoing investigation into labor violations at several construction sites across Los Angeles. State officials have instructed staff to refuse entry to ICE agents who visit their offices to apprehend immigrants. They should ask immigration agents “to leave our office, including the waiting room, and inform the agent[s] that the labor commissioner does not consent to entry or search of any

part of our office,” the memo says.

Some 35,000 workers a year file claims for back pay with the Labor Commission, many from industries that are heavily dependent on immigrants. The office also hears minimum wage and overtime violations, and claims against bosses who punish workers for protesting their conditions. Under California law, it’s illegal for a company to retaliate against workers by calling federal immigration to report their status.

## **Chrysler Execs Bribe UAW Officials**

A federal indictment charges UAW officials and FIAT/Chrysler executives with bribery and conspiracy to shaft workers. The UAW says the bribery did not affect the concessionary contracts they bargained, among other things reinstating the 10-hour day (they don’t have to be paid for that), but only joint union-management training programs for workers. The bribes and misappropriated funds allegedly totalled \$4.5 million.

## **65 Million People Displaced**

More than 65 million people around the world have been displaced by war, famine, destitution and persecution, according to Doctors Without Borders. Many live in refugee camps or on the streets in their home countries; more than a third have fled abroad, where they are subjected to concentration camps, police raids, and the constant threat of deportation – often to their deaths.

In the United States, nearly half (49%) of federal criminal prosecutions in the last years of the Obama administration were against people accused of being in the country without legal permission. Many are imprisoned for long terms, more are deported away from their family and friends – often to countries they have not set foot in since they were children.

## **Pilot Refuses to Deport Refugee**

The deportation of a young Afghan man refused asylum by the British government was delayed in August after the pilot of the plane refused to take off until he was removed from the plane.

Samim Bigzad fled Afghanistan two years ago after being threatened with beheading by the Taliban. When activists heard he was being deported, they went to Heathrow Airport to talk to passengers due to be on the same Turkish Airlines flight, hoping they would raise objections to crew members. By the time airport security intervened, they had managed to speak to most passengers.

The flight took off 45 minutes late, but only after the pilot demanded that Bigzad be removed. He was returned to a detention center, where he is pressing his appeal for asylum.

## **Evict the Rich**

The U.S. faces a nationwide housing crisis, as skyrocketing rents force many workers to spend a third or more of their wages on rent, and leave many workers homeless. The most frequently proposed solution has been to build more housing – sometimes with public subsidies, sometimes by exempting developers from zoning or other requirements.

But in many cities, the richest neighborhoods are also some of the most vacant. In the pricey stretch of Manhattan between Park and Fifth Avenues and 56th and 59th Streets, 57 percent of apartments are vacant at least ten months a year, according to a *New York Times* analysis. Even in smaller cities, downtowns are being filled with expensive and often empty apartment buildings. If this unused housing was turned over to those needing homes, there’d be more than enough to go around.

**MOVING?** Please send us your new address.



## **Burgerville Workers Labor Day Strike**

Members of the Industrial Workers of the World launched a strike in Portland, Oregon, at fast food chain Burgerville on Labor Day, Sept. 4. The strike is the latest move by workers at the restaurant who have been organizing for months and demanding wage increases, an end to harassment for union activities, better schedules, and improved conditions.

In a statement on their Facebook page the workers put their strike in the context of Labor Day as a celebration of workers' power. They note that while in the past, unlike other workers celebrating the holiday off with family and friends, they are usually working for their miserable wage or face losing wages and retaliation from the boss if they decide to take the day off. "Instead of going to work for poverty wages while corporate bigshots take vacations, we are taking a stand. We are taking back Labor Day for our families, our friends, our coworkers, and ourselves. We are taking back Labor Day because we know that better pay, fair schedules, consistent hours, and healthier work environments have only ever been won by workers standing together and fighting for them."

## **Berkeley, CA: IWW Recycling Workers Walk Off Job Over Unpaid Wages**

Workers at Buyback Recyclers in Berkeley, walked off the job August 24, after the payment of their wages was delayed without explanation. Workers discovered at the start of their shift that none of them had received their scheduled payment for the previous two weeks' work, which was due to come through earlier that morning.

This was the third time this year that wages have not been paid on time – something that can cause extensive problems for the finances of workers and their families. After being offered no explanation from management, Buyback workers held a shopfloor union meeting and voted 18-0 to immediately walk out.

Buyback workers had already struck twice this year – the first an unannounced half-day walkout during the February 16 'Day Without Immigrants,' and the second a two-hour stoppage to hold a celebratory barbecue on May 1.

## **Malaga: Being a Unionist a Crime**

The CNT of Malaga, Spain, pursued a dispute with Brunch It, a company in the hospitality sector, with mass picketing for several months that concluded with voluntary union recognition, reinstatement of a wrongfully dismissed fellow worker, and the awarding of wages to compensate her. However, the company has retaliated with a criminal complaint against two CNT members – the worker who was fired and the union's general-secretary – who were accused without evidence of coercion and disturbing the public order, which resulted in prison sentences of 2 years and a day, and fines of more than 8,000 Euros. An appeal is pending.

The dismissal of the fellow worker came about because she spoke out against a company manifesto that included things like:

- No kissing when greeting or saying goodbye to co-workers.
- When something is broken it will be the responsibility of the worker, or the work group, to replace the thing with an almost identical object.
- Differences showing up during reconciliation of cash at the end of one shift and beginning of the next will have to be paid

by the worker.

- Dispute resolution sessions were ended. When a person complains, it will be understood that he/she is not integrated in his/her position, and should not be there, and perhaps the complaint is his/her way of "saying goodbye," not knowing how to communicate it in another way.

## **CGT Rejects Union Agreement with Ferrovial Servicios S.A.**

Members of the union section of CGT representing workers of Ferrovial Servicios S.A., after actively participating in extended negotiations, and having jointly convened (together with the USO union) past strikes, has decided not to sign the collective agreement of the company Ferrovial Servicios, S.A. that affects all personnel who provide services on board Renfe trains as well as logistics in depots.

The CGT, an independent syndicalist union, rejected the proposed agreement – signed by the CC.OO., SF and UGT business unions – because it does not meet the demands raised by workers during assemblies in January 2017 and October 2016, which should form the basis for any agreement. The proposed wage increases are insufficient to keep up with inflation, and the agreement does not resolve disciplinary charges brought by Ferrovial Servicios during the negotiations in order to pressure workers to make concessions. Moreover, it leaves intact provisions of the previous contract which the company has been creatively reinterpreting in order to evade the protections workers had secured in past agreements.

The CGT will attempt to work through the enterprise committee system to improve the working conditions of all workers who are hurt by the signing of this agreement, and will attempt to defend workers against the company's attacks.

## **Protest Against Wage Theft in Bulgaria**

On Sept. 5, 150 workers from different cities and companies organized with the anarcho-syndicalist Autonomous Worker's Union came together in solidarity and marched in front of the Bulgarian Parliament. Their demands were for immediate payment of their salaries and for criminalization of wage theft.

In the past year, thousands of workers were robbed by their bosses, sparking a wave of strikes and protests across the country.

This protest was the first step of a joint campaign against the bosses organized by workers from different cities and sectors. It's a result of several assemblies conducted in the past months when workers from the retailer company Picadilly along with workers from Max Telecom decided to organize with Autonomous Worker's Union and to seek solidarity from workers from other sectors. Later, the initiative was joined by miners from Bobov Dol, dressmakers from Dupnitsa, and chemical factory workers from Dimitrograd.

This protest was the first coordinated action conducted by the workers but the plan is to continue until all of the demands are met. Demands include: 1. Immediate payment of due wages and benefits; 2. Criminalization of wage theft; 3. Prohibition on transferring ownership of an enterprise if it owes salaries; 4. When an enterprise is in bankruptcy, the workers must be first in the list of creditors.

This campaign is something unique in recent Bulgarian history.



It's the first time when workers from different sectors decided to self-organize together in solidarity, outside the bureaucratic unions, using the tools of grass-roots syndicalism. (libcom.org)

### **Brighton Solidarity Federation opens dispute with MTM lettings agency**

Brighton Solidarity Federation has started a dispute with MTM lettings on the Lewes road. A group of tenants have been organizing with SolFed after they were rented a house with serious damp and mold problems, infestations, and poor furniture that the landlady had promised to replace.

The tenants were introduced to the landlady by a different letting agency in the city, which was intermittently involved in the tenancy for the first six months. Administration was then transferred to MTM. The first letting agency refunded the tenants their agency fees, totalling £1200, on 24th August, after a brief picket protesting against the agency for introducing the tenants to this poor-quality accommodation.

The campaign has now transferred to the landlady's current agency, MTM, beginning with a picket outside the branch on 5th September. Brighton SolFed has supported the tenants to try and find a resolution to the dispute, with a demand letter being delivered to both MTM and the landlady. However, so far, an adequate offer of compensation has not been made.

The tenants are demanding compensation out of the £34,320 rent that they paid over the course of twelve months. The damp problems took six months to inadequately address, the infestation problems persisted until the end of the tenancy, and women living in the house were subject to harassment by the tradesmen that carried out the work. All in all, it has been a distressing experience. One tenant commented: "The stress that dealing with this for a year has caused me has affected my university work. We just want to be respected and compensated for living in such a terrible property."

The landlady has consistently tried to obfuscate this process into administrative and bureaucratic procedures that take significant amounts of time, technical knowledge, and which are stacked in favor of landlords by virtue of being carried out by various groups – councils, the ombudsman, the letting agency themselves – which do not want to upset or lose the business of landlords. The problem for the agency is that SolFed does not hide disputes in administrative or judicial procedures. Our intention is to bring every dispute onto the streets. Not just because it is faster, cheaper and more effective, but also because it is the only way we can understand that each of us has the same problems. Through solidarity and direct action, ordinary people have the power to improve their lives.

### **Council Lies Extend Bin Strike**

Refuse collection workers in Birmingham, UK, have voted strongly in favor of extending strike action for a further three months. Unite's ballot concluded on 18 September, with 92.4% in favor. This is a slight increase on the 90% in favor when strikes first began on 30 June.

The current strike ballot expires on 21st September and 14 days' notice to employers is legally required before a new strike can start, so there will be a 10-day period where strikers have to go back to work. The city of Birmingham now faces the prospect of waste-filled streets throughout the Christmas period.

Leading up to the strike, the council made clear its intention to reorganize how waste is to be collected, under a pretense of efficiency. Each refuse collection vehicle has a three-person crew; a driver and two at the back, one of whom is responsible for safety. The

Labour-controlled Birmingham city council intends to downgrade the worker responsible for safety and place the entire responsibility for both the front and rear end of the vehicle onto the driver.

Any workers unfortunate enough to be downgraded will face a pay cut of up to £5,000 from a wage as little as £21,000 a year. As recent months have shown, councils willing to sacrifice safety for the sake of costs are one of the major stories emerging in the aftermath of the Grenfell tower tragedy.

After ten weeks of uncollected piles of waste (mostly in poorer wards), the council has done little but escalate their assault against waste and refuse workers. This includes serving over 100 workers with redundancy notices; opening 31 disciplinary investigations against refuse collectors, and the suspension of and disciplinary action against a shop steward. In addition, the council managed to suspend the strike by offering a deal they had no intention of upholding. This ultimately led to the resignation of council leader John Clancy and the extension of strike action. (libcom.org)

### **Dockers Refuse Service to Troops**

The Organization of Port Workers of Barcelona refused services to two cruise ships anchored in the port in September. Tarragona dockworkers also refused supply services to vessels carrying some 4,000 federal riot police and paramilitary Civil Guard sent by Spain's Interior Ministry to crush a secession referendum in Catalonia. Ironically, the Catalan nationalist government strongly backs efforts to privatize the port in order to break workers' job control. Dockworker Gabriel Jiménez told the daily *El País*, "If they were normal cruise ships or a refugee boat we would supply it without thinking, but to these ships, ... we will not give them anything."

### **Warehouse Strikers Face Blacklist**

After being locked out for several days for showing solidarity with fellow workers in Carpiano, Italy, 70 of 400 warehouse workers at SDA Bologna were allowed to return in September. But although three-fourths of the workers are SI Cobas members, only 11 union members were allowed back. The solidarity strike began after a new outsourcing firm managing the Carpiano facility said it would revoke many of the rights workers had won in past struggles.

### **Miners' Wildcat Strike in Bulgaria**

BY JOHN KALWAIC

Miners employed by the third-largest manganese mine in the world, the EuroMangan Company, launched a five-day wildcat strike on June 1 in Obrochishte, Bulgaria. EuroMangan also controls the miners' union that supported the bosses. The strike began when 17 miners refused to leave the mine after their shift. Some 150 workers blockaded trucks from going in and out of the tunnel. Members of the Autonomous Workers Union (ARS), an anarcho-syndicalist union, helped the miners blockade the entrances of the mine.

The strike began after the EuroMangan mine operators refused to comply with the collective agreement signed months ago. In addition, the company withheld miners' pay for April. That agreement increased miners' salaries by 75 Euros per month and helped workers pay for food and transportation. Under the previous contract, miners received 230 Euros, which is minimum wage in Bulgaria. Under the previous contract, miners did not receive proper equipment, food vouchers, transportation, or working conditions.

The concessionary contract was adopted in 1999 when right-wing Prime Minister Ivan Kostov was in power. Kostov launched a wave of privatizations, including of the Bulgarian mines. The



Obrochishte mine came under the ownership of EuroMangan, which is owned by a company in Cyprus whose ultimate ownership is unclear. The privatization of this mine has led to social and environmental problems. One operator-boss was known among the workers as “the Satan.” She insulted miners and refused to sign their work papers for social benefits. She even refused to open the mine gates for an ambulance taking an injured miner to the hospital.

The new contract came about after an official strike in March, as well as a hunger strike and mass demonstrations for higher salaries and improved conditions. EuroMangan CEO David Wellings called the strike “an extortion.” Unfortunately, many practices from the old contract were still in effect even after the strike ended. As a result, workers held a wildcat strike on June 1. ARS members not only helped with the blockade of the mine but also organized a solidarity demonstration in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia. ARS activists also raised money for food and supplies.

The strike ended when the government decided to “freeze” the old 1999 concessionary contract. After this partial victory, the miners are cautious and ready to strike again if necessary.

### **Workers Threaten to Blow Up Factory**

Workers at a car component factory in central France threatened to blow up their factory in May as part of a fight against layoffs by the GM&S Auto Supply Company. The owners planned to sell the factory, but workers wanted assurances that they would not be laid off. The bosses refused to negotiate with the workers, who responded with direct action – destroying machinery and setting fire to garbage at the plant. Workers set booby traps in the form of gas canisters and petrol throughout the factory and threatened to blow it up with dynamite. The workers, who are organized with the CGT, a former Communist Party-backed union, have tried to negotiate with the government but were not getting anywhere with the new president, Emanuel Macron. Macron is pressing for labor “reforms” to strip job security and other protections. [JK]

### **French Bike Couriers Protest Pay Cut**

BY JOHN KALWAIC

On August 11, bicycle delivery couriers working for the Deliveroo Delivery Company held a mass protest against a pay cut. Deliveroo lowered the pay of bike couriers from 10 Euros to 5 Euros per delivery effective August 28.

In May, bike couriers were outraged when some of the couriers’ apps that facilitated their deliveries were deleted, leaving them unemployed. Deliveroo said these couriers had been deleted due to non-compliance with contract terms, such as failure to wear the company’s green uniforms. Couriers don’t have medical insurance or allowances for bike repairs. The couriers were also demanding an end to the company forcing them to work excessive hours.

One protestor said that he only made 600 Euros in the 35-hour week he works – 400 Euros below the French minimum wage. Delivery workers have been organizing and resisting down-sizing and lack of workers’ rights since spring 2016.

### **Bosnapping in Burmese Factory**

BY JOHN KALWAIC

On Sept. 4, 200 protesting workers from the DJY Knitting Myanmar Ltd sock factory barricaded their boss inside a factory located in the Rangoon area of Myanmar – escalating a strike that began August 7 to protest the firing of worker activist Soe Thura Ko. The workers demanded that Soe be rehired and the right to have an independent trade union.

Management gave workers until August 22 to return to work; when workers refused, management sacked 228 out of 400 workers. Striker Ko Phyo Ko Aung stated, “The factory officials violated the law. They fired us without proper reasons. Now we’re also forced to break the law. We resorted to blockade in search of a better outcome. The factory denied both rehiring and compensating. We have no other choice than to build barricades. It can last more than two months if we go with the arbitration councils system and strikers have problems with their daily expenses.”

An activist with the labor organization We Generation, Ko Aung Soe Min, said they were trying to find a solution: “The factory blocked every possible route for conciliation. We don’t encourage the barricades, which are illegal, but we also don’t object to their strike.”

The bosses escaped from the factory, but workers vow to continue barricading the factory until their demands are met.

### **6,000 Vietnamese Workers Wildcat**

BY JOHN KALWAIC

Around 6,000 garment workers went on strike in the Thanh Hoa region of Vietnam Sept. 6 at S&H Vina Co. Ltd factory, which is owned by a South Korean company known as the SAE-A Group.

The initial spark that led to the strike was that management confiscated off-cuts of fabric the workers were using for comfort when they sat down for lunch break, forcing them to sit on the ground. Workers were outraged and 2,000 stopped work. They were later joined by around 4,000 coworkers. The workers’ demands included: increased wages, child benefits, seniority bonuses, adequate maternity leave, reasonable working hours, and scrapping penalties for absence from work.

Company policy dictated that workers face repercussions for taking sick leave and emergency absences. Workers must notify the company three days in advance for sick leave and have only one day of paid leave a month. The manager who oversaw the offcut confiscation incident was fired, and management agreed to sit down with the workers and the state-run General Labor Confederation.

In Vietnam, the General Labor Confederation ‘represents’ all workers, as it is a state-run union controlled by Vietnam’s ruling Communist Party. Strikes have been legal since 1994 but are rarely tolerated and the General Labor Confederation does not endorse them. Most strikes like the one at S&H Vina Co. Ltd factory are wildcat strikes.

### **Target Workers Win Wildcat Strike**

BY JOHN KALWAIC

Workers at a Target department store in Christiansburg, Virginia, held a wildcat strike August 23 over sexual harassment and racial discrimination. The general manager had abused workers for years, inappropriately touching employees and making sexually suggestive as well as racist remarks. Some employees were retaliated against when they took this up with Target Human Resources, and there was no union in the shop. So workers went on strike with support from a local group, New River Workers Power.

There were two main demands: The immediate firing of the general manager and recognition of the Independent Workers Committee to handle grievances at the Christiansburg Target store.

After several days of picketing, the manager was dismissed Sept. 8 and the strike ended. Workers continue to press other issues. They do not make a living wage, have no health insurance from the company, and struggle to pay rent and buy groceries. Target CEO Brian Cornel ‘earns’ \$28.1 million a year.



# Fascist Attack in Charlottesville

Neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, Virginia, attacked protesters and murdered a protester widely reported to be an IWW member – part of a group of Wobblies and others mowed down when one of the neo-Nazis plowed his car into the crowd.

The Industrial Workers of the World issued this statement: “Heather Heyer, the 32-year old murdered by fascists on August 12, 2017, lost her life protesting the fascists. She should be alive with us today. We carry her in our hearts, and move forward with the struggle determined to realize the hopes she held when she faced down the fascists.

“On the internet, it has been widely reported that Heather was a member of our union, the IWW. It does not appear that she ever joined our union, but we would have welcomed her. She was a courageous woman and we should all seek inspiration from her and work to amplify her message. Members of the IWW were on the scene and were among the wounded. Like Heather, they courageously stood up to the forces of hate in one of the largest fascist gatherings in decades. We are grateful that they remain with us, and we are furious that Heather is with us no longer.”

The violence began the night before as hundreds of neo-Nazis and other white nationalists descended on the city, chanting fascist slogans and attacking protesters. Many of the neo-nazis were carrying assault rifles and other weapons; police stood by as one fired in the direction of protesters and then walked past a police barricade. (He was arrested two weeks later on charges of discharging a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school, after the ACLU released video footage of the incident they had earlier shared with police.)

Police allowed the fascists free reign to terrorize the city, refusing to protect Congregation Beth Israel, where gun-toting neo-Nazis

stood watch at the entrance, and hundreds of fascists paraded past chanting “Sieg Heil” and other anti-Semitic slogans. (Forty worshippers ultimately escaped through the rear of the synagogue.) Cornel West, part of a group of clergy and civil rights activists standing arm-in-arm in an attempt to block the fascist march, noted that the police made no effort to protect them. “We would have been crushed like cockroaches if it were not for the anarchists and the antifascists who approached, over 300, 350 antifascists. We just had 20. ... They saved our lives.”

A Virginia state trooper interfered with a street medic who was trying to save Heyer’s life. As the medic administered CPR, the trooper forcibly removed an EMT who was assisting in resuscitation. The trooper continued ordering the medic and protesters who were assisting her to leave – stopping only when a firefighter arrived on the scene and took over chest compressions.

This brazen display of fascist violence triggered renewed calls to tear down Confederate and other race-baiting monuments across the country. In Durham, North Carolina, protesters took matters into their own hands, toppling a memorial to Confederate soldiers erected in 1924, as a resurgent Ku Klux Klan was terrorizing African-Americans, Jews, and labor activists. Four people were arrested for this act of civic improvement, and hundreds lined up outside the jail to turn themselves in as participants.

In Minneapolis, performers and bar workers walked out of Clubhouse Jäger after learning that its owner was financially supporting former Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon David Duke, now a white supremacist Republican. Workers quit en masse after learning that their labor was supporting racists and fascists. The owner told a local television station the donation was a matter of “free speech.”

## Unions Against Fascism

BY SHANE BURLEY

Patriot Prayer isn’t known for its good taste.

The far-right organization, known for linking up “Patriot” militias with Alt Right white nationalists, became notorious for taking up the “free speech” rally model started by Lauren Southern in the “Battle for Berkeley.” In Portland, Oregon, and the surrounding suburbs, their organizer, Joey Gibson, instigated violent clashes with leftist protesters as he refused to tone down the “America First” rhetoric. In May, Jeremy Christian, a man who eagerly joined Patriot Prayer’s events, murdered two on Portland public transit in an Islamophobic frenzy. Gibson’s response was to hold his June 4 rally just a couple of weeks later in a federal park, which drew over 3,000 protesters in a show of unprecedented antifascist unity.

On August 26, in the wake of the savage race riot and vehicular murder in Charlottesville, Gibson decided to bring his act down to the Bay area, where a number of far-right provocateurs were intending to join him. This would start with a “Freedom Rally” along the waterfront, which activists countered with a mass “poop in” by bringing their dogs to the beach without waste bags.<sup>1</sup> The following day the “anti-Marxist” message would be brought to the streets, picking up on the white supremacist conspiracy theory that modern “progressive” values are actually the result of subversive Jewish “Cultural Marxism.”

Patriot Prayer’s plans sparked one of the quickest engagements of mass organizing in years as coalitions formed around the city with

everything from radical art shows to a mass marches to disallow Gibson access to the streets or city parks. While the Bay’s progressive line-up began their plans, it was the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 that stepped out in front to lead this community revolt. Just days before the Alt Right was to descend on the city, Local 10 passed the “Motion to Stop the Fascists in San Francisco,” calling for “all unions and anti-racist and anti-fascist organizations to join us defending unions, racial minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ people, women and all the oppressed.” ILWU was instrumental in raising the antifascist coalition’s profile enough to force Gibson to cancel the event, and when he tried to move it to San Francisco’s Alamo Park, the union took to the streets and helped form a block to prevent entry.<sup>2</sup>

Right now, labor in the United States is being pushed to a state of execution. With the political power in the hands of the beltway right, attacks on public sector unions, collective bargaining, exclusive representation, and the rights of workers to organize, are forcing labor to look past immediate contractual gains and to the larger contradictions the working class faces. Capital’s attack on unions is happening at the same time as a radical right populism is sweeping the U.S., with Trumpism ushering in what the Freedom Party brought to Austria, Brexit offered to the UK, and what Le Pen could have leveled on France. With the Alt Right as the militant fascist edge of this movement, organized labor is placed where it is often put in times of crisis: uniquely targeted



and decisively necessary.

### **“Then they came for the unionists...”**

Looking at the historical fascist movements that rose to power in interwar Europe, labor is crushed swiftly and decisively. As the Nazis rose to power in Germany, the SS took control of the trade unions in 1933, banning them as working class institutions and molding their organs into the German Labor Front. With 7 million members, Germany had one of the largest labor movements in the world.<sup>3</sup> In Italy, Mussolini took a different approach and captured the unions entirely, creating large fascist trade unions with over four million members. These organizations were extensions of the fascist state, losing their ability to fight for workers' interests as Mussolini gained power by cruelly crushing socialist and anarchist partisans.<sup>4</sup> The attack on unionists was, largely, an extension of the fascist attack on the organized left as leaders rightly understood that both sides had the ability to pull heavily from the experiences of the working class. While Hitler and Mussolini appealed to the bourgeois classes by suppressing worker movements, it was an appeal to the broad masses that gave fascism its power. The class conflict implicit to capitalism is then suppressed in favor of mediated class collaboration; the fire for change the fuels class struggle then rechanneled into reactionary battles between identities, racial, sexual, and otherwise.

The unions themselves were, at the time, the largest and most successful results of social movements, a hundred years of struggle to create massive organizations that took on the interests of the oppressed classes. That strength, rooted in the ability to withhold labor, could bring the country to its knees, and its nature is rooted in the working class unity that necessitates antiracism. If the unions are weakened, removed as militant vehicles for the desires of working people, then mass movements lose one of their key strategic vessels.

Unions today are often defined by their concessions, what was allowed to them by the state during the 1920s and 1930s. But a union is more than collective bargaining agreements and grievance procedures. It is simply an expression of unified class power, the ability of a group of workers to exert power through solidarity. For workers today (and throughout the history of organized labor), their subjective experiences of class and identity are more than just pay scales, but include everything from racial discrimination by management to the fear of violence they have leaving their houses in the morning. For non-white workers, that violence continues, both from the state as police murders continue unchallenged, and through vigilantes, from the KKK in earlier generations to the Alt Right terrorizing campuses and city centers today.

Unions can expand their conception of working class struggle to take on issues not only at the bargaining table, but also throughout the world that workers inhabit, something that is only becoming more necessary as those traditional rights are legally eroded. With a larger financial infrastructure than most left organizations and the growing injection of labor into broad coalitions, they have the tools and membership to be active in directly undermining the radical right surge.

### **IWW General Defense Committee**

For many syndicalists, the IWW has been a centerpiece of this radical experiment for a century, starting as an alternative to the increasingly compromised AFL models of negotiated labor. The IWW continues to explode at moments of contradiction, organizing that stretches models to the point of redefinition. The



PHOTO: SHANE BURLEY

non-contract campaigns of the Burgerville Workers Union, the prison organizing of the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, and solidarity networks are windows into what is possible when the strictures shackling organized labor are ignored and the basic principles of organizing are opened up to the imagination.

It is no wonder that the IWW looked to the past to rebuild a project that could extend the reach of the organization into the increasingly caustic world of tenancy, police violence, and insurrectionary racist threats. The General Defense Committee was first started in 1917 as a technically separate organization from the broader IWW to take on issues like state repression of members around anti-war protests and during later red scares. Because it was a legally separate entity, it could take some shelter from state attacks on the IWW that seemed imminent. The GDC was brought back to take on issues that were not strictly workplace derived, and antifascist work has become the brand it is best known by. The Twin Cities branch chartered a GDC in 2011, yet their antifascist committee started long before that as members had previous experience as founders of Anti-Racist Action in the 1980s and the Torch Network that is known for linking up Antifa organizations. The GDC has grown to over 200 members with committees chartered across the country.<sup>5</sup>

The Twin Cities GDC Local 14 started by confronting a 2012 appearance of David Irving, the notorious WWII ‘historian’ turned Holocaust Denier, building the praxis that would instruct their later work. As opposed to the close-knit and highly secretive format that describes most Antifa organizations, the GDC has used a “mass antifascist” approach. This means focusing on bringing in large coalitions of people, generally being public about their image, and trying to do popular education and engagement. This still results in the battle over “contested spaces,” music venues, public arenas, and college campuses. This can also mean in direct engagement, forcing the neo-Nazis out of their speaking event or meeting spaces, but it is done through appeals to huge community contingents.

Mixing a radical analysis, direct action, and broad community involvement are the same principles that have made the Wobblies such a success in workplace organizing, and it those winning methods that they are using to turn entire neighborhoods and social networks into mass antifascist forces. Since the rise of the Alt Right starting in 2015, the GDC has been present in almost every major action, from shutting down far-right agitator Milo Yiannopoulos in Seattle, De Paul and the University of Wisconsin, challenging Infowars at the Republican National Convention, and shutting down fascist neofolk artists like Blood + Sun.<sup>6</sup>



## **Pacific Northwest Antifascist Workers Collective**

In Portland, a group of trade unionists whose roots in militant antifascism went back thirty years came back to that anti-racist organizing by looking exactly at where they work. In organizations like the Carpenters Union, workers were regularly forced to interact coworkers who were openly adorned with neo-Nazi iconography, such as portraits of Hitler in visible tattoos. For many neo-Nazis who had been involved in skinhead gangs and were felons, building trades unions provided a pathway to a good, stable job that often shielded them from political fallout and did not penalize them for criminal histories. Organizers from the Carpenters Local 1503, Ironworkers Local 29, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 10, and antifascist organizers came together to form the Pacific Northwest Antifascist Workers Collective to confront the influx of the far-right from inside of the labor movement.<sup>7</sup>

One of PNWAWC's key strategies was to put through antifascist resolutions in union locals whose membership may actually have some allegiances to white supremacist formations. Painters Local

10 and the Carpenters Union Local 1503 passed this resolution, next attempting to build antifascist committees within the local. IUPAT went as far as forming an Anti-Racist Mobilization Committee that will be used to get union members to support antiracist community actions and to reach out to other trade unions to do the same.<sup>8</sup>

Their work extends to antifascist strategies that are often well known to Antifa and Anti-Racist Action groups, which many of their members started in. This includes organizing as a coalition with groups like Rose City Antifa to confront far-right assemblies, especially in "contested spaces," refusing access. Doxxing, information dissemination and popular education are all a part of this, as well as committing many of their members to act as community defense and security in situations that could result in fascist intimidation. After a local public-sector union had been hosting antifascist events from groups like the Portland Assembly and Demand Utopia, threats began coming down on the union hall. When several alleged far-right agitators showed up, donning masks, the collective coordinated unionists and organizers to

## **Flying Squads & Self Defense Now**

BY JEFF SHANTZ

Fascist times are periods of open, brutal, class war (when the sheets quite literally slip off). Events of the last year, including the killing of three people opposing a white supremacist shouting racist and anti-Muslim slurs at two women on a mass transit train in Portland and the murder of IWW fellow worker Heather Heyer by a neo-Nazi in Charlottesville show the desperate need for working class self-defense of our communities.

In this we can draw on examples of rank-and-file self-defense organization. I would suggest, in particular, the rank-and-file flying squad provides an existing model for a rapid mobilization defense force for community protection.

I grew up in an autoworker family and in my family union, UAW (then CAW, now UNIFOR) Local 444, there was a very active and militant flying squad. It was deployed to defend workers and the community against a range of social threats, including, of course, during strikes, but also beyond. In Toronto, CAW flying squads were mobilized to defend immigrant and people facing deportation. Flying squads also defended unemployed workers and homeless people from attacks by police and rightist vigilantes during protests and demonstrations. A rank-and-file Canadian Union of Public Employees flying squad mobilized to defend Indigenous land protectors against racist mobs.

### **Flying Squads**

The flying squad structure operates along the lines of affinity groups with which anarchists are so familiar and which many prefer. The structure allows members to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, preferences and discomforts. The active relationships of the flying squad reinforce accountability and commitment.

In Toronto, anarchists, some of whom were union members, formed an autonomous flying squad. The autonomous flying squad was organized typically to do strike support for workers on picket lines. Flying squad members could engage in activities, such as violating injunctions or strike protocols, that the striking workers did not feel they could do. The autonomous flying squad also mobilized for support of community groups during political actions.

In Vancouver, unionists have organized a self-defense unit, the Peacekeepers. They train together and organize to defend protesters against opponents including fascist groups such as the Soldiers of Odin. This is one model of mobile self-defense organizing that combines explicit self-defense with a flying squad structure for rapid mobilization and coordinated action.

In some cases flying squad members, as members of unions, can draw on additional established working class resources, such as legal support and defense funds for members who might need them based on their flying squad self-defense activities. These resources might not be available to more precarious or vulnerable people who might be targeted by fascists or police.

As self-defense practices spread, other groupings can take on some of these roles but the flying squad offers an already existing body of workers ready, willing and able to do some of the work of self-defense. IWW branches could organize for this work, as Vancouver Wobblies are beginning to strategize around.

### **Conclusion**

That anarchists and antifascists have been attacked with force at demonstrations (as in Vancouver and Seattle, where an antifascist syndicalist was shot) has made this a pressing concern. The murder of Heather Heyer brought home that these attacks on antifascists are not one-off events.

In Vancouver, unfortunately, in the absence of organized and effective self-defense formations, antifascists have had to rely on limited, and hierarchical, union marshals for defense at rallies. While this is fine up to a point and shows the necessity of flying squads, it means that the antifascists became dependent on groupings of which they are not integrally a part (even if their interests are the same and they work in solidarity).

In Vancouver, the IWW branch is making a possibly significant turn towards self-defense training and organizing to act as a defense squad for public mobilizations and potentially for community self-defense, but their numbers are small. A broader flying squad drawing on experiences and participation of already organized working class flying squads, could provide more extensive defense.



surround the building, refusing to allow them on the property.<sup>9</sup>

## Portland Labor Against Fascists

Many organizers with some relationship to PNWAWC came together to form the Portland Labor Against Fascists coalition to have a labor presence at the growing number of collisions between far-right rallies and the public. When Patriot Prayer announced its June 4 rally despite the pleas of the city, multiple groups organized to surround the event. On one side was a more mild-mannered coalition of progressive groups brought together by the International Socialist Organization, while adjacent to the in the park was the united Antifa block. On the south side of the far-right rally was the labor coalition, organized, in part, by Trotskyist organizations, and with members from the various building trades as well as Amalgamated Transit Union 757, CWA 7901 and different AFL-CIO affiliates.

The rhetoric here was simple: destroying the narrative that the Patriot militia and blue-collar white power groups have, that they are acting in the interests of the white working class. With Ironworkers and IBEW electricians on the megaphones, they were able to speak to worker exploitation, not from “mass immigration” or affirmative action, but from mega-corporations that are crushing wages and collective bargaining. Since some participants in the Alt Right come from those represented trades, hearing from people in the same professions and workplaces makes a difference. This has been the strategy of non-labor specific organizations like Redneck Revolt, who use the language of gun-rights and government mistrust to speak to the same crowd that the militia movement recruits from.

## Labor's Turn

As the cultural wave of reactionary anger turned into a Trump presidency, many in the broad labor movement were forced to speak up out of the crisis of circumstance. With the heavy focus of Alt Right groups like Identity Europa on campus recruitment, student and faculty groups have found common cause in confronting their threat. The Duke Graduate Student Union and the University of California Student Workers have come out to endorse student projects like the Campus Anti-Fascist Network, which is using a nationally coordinated approach to long-term mass antifascist movement building.<sup>10</sup>

As Patriot Prayer's event loomed on the horizon in Berkeley, a large coalition formed for the Bay Area Rally Against Hate that would link up a huge swath of community and labor organizations. This again drew from unions with an association with education and college campuses, including the Berkeley Federation of Teachers, AFSCME Local 3299 (a UC Berkeley local), SEIU Local 1021, and UAW Local 2865, as well as a contingent of Berkeley student workers. The Alameda Labor Council and San Francisco Labor Council both signed as endorsers, a success for such a highly partisan affair.<sup>11</sup> ILWU Local 10 was a leader in the effort to block Patriot Prayer, bringing out retired members who had joined the movement against South African apartheid in the 1980s. IUPAT Local 10 voted in a resolution and public statement that put their full support behind the ILWU's decision in the bay, saying that they take from their example “in the struggle for workers' rights against racism, war, and police repression.”<sup>12</sup>

While many large unions have avoided using the language of antifascism, there has been an impetus for many to rise up on the primary issues of racial victimization in the Trump era. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka joined Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff in a “categorical rejection” of Islamophobia,<sup>13</sup>

and after the comments Trump made after the Charlottesville violence he pulled out of the American Manufacturing Council.<sup>14</sup>

Trumka is far from a radical unionist, but it shows the tone that is shifting inside large labor institutions. In years past, the rhetoric of “America First” echoed into union halls as jobs were being offshored. This attempt to stoke a subtle racism while mobilizing workers against de-industrialization lost them the ability to effectively fight the experiences of racism that workers face, and there are signs this decision is being reversed as they continue to lose ground with their attempts at class collaboration. The movement by many unions, from UNITE HERE Local 2850 to National Union of Healthcare Workers, to become “sanctuary unions” is another turn, acknowledging the horror of ICE deportations that are entering into their member communities. Local 2850 has been working to add protections for immigrants into contracts as well as seeking local and statewide resolutions in support of their immigrant workforce.<sup>15</sup>

The role of large labor organizations is more mixed, but with their large memberships and financial infrastructure there are more opportunities they can lend to antifascist movements than can militant unions. This may end up more passive than anything, the allying of resources, buildings and participation in coalitions, while leaving the more open antifascist work to organizers free from the strictures of non-profit status. As unions have increasingly diverse membership, they will be pressured to stand up for the issues that fascist ideologues have owned, confronting mass deportations, the victimization of racial and gender minorities, and the increased threat that far-right politics represent to their membership.

The position of unions as a conceptual force is even more central as its mechanisms of class power are some of the most profound in history. The ability to use solidarity to dethrone the authority in a workplace can be expanded to the community, and the mass base, the ability to strike and worker empowerment can all be pivoted to see not only institutional injustice, but also the insurrectionary violence of white supremacy, as a target. Fascist politics splits the working class, a fragmentation that spells defeat in even the most class reductionist sense, and there is every reason for union members to be on the front lines.

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*Ironworkers and IBEW electricians on the megaphones were able to speak to worker exploitation, not from “mass immigration” or affirmative action but from mega-corporations...*



# Anarchists Against Hitler: The underground in the Rhineland

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On Nov. 5, 1937, Julius Nolden, a car plant worker from Duisburg, was sentenced by the "People's Court" in Berlin to a ten year prison term for "preparing an act of high treason with aggravating circumstances."

Nolden had been at the head of the FAUD (anarcho-syndicalist Free Union of German Workers, part of the International Workers Association) in the Rhineland when that underground organization

was dismantled by the Gestapo in January 1937. Arrested with him were 88 other male and female anarcho-syndicalists who stood trial in the Rhineland in early 1938.

In 1921 the FAUD in Duisburg had around 5,000 members. After that the numbers fell and by the time Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, only a few tiny groups remained. For example, there were about 25 militants active in the Duisburg area and the Rhineland regional union had 180 to 200 dues-paying members.

At its last regional congress, held in Erfurt in March 1932, the FAUD had decided that in the event of the Nazis taking power its federal bureau in Berlin would be shut down and replaced by an underground directorate and that there would have to be a general strike by way of reply. The latter decision proved impracticable – for one thing, the FAUD right across Germany was decimated by a wave of arrests.

In April-May 1933, Gerhardt Wartenburg, before being obliged to flee the country, managed to find a replacement for himself as secretary of the FAUD in the person of Emil Zehner, an Erfurt blacksmith. Wartenburg fled to Amsterdam, where he was welcomed along with other German émigrés by the Dutch anarcho-syndicalist Albert de Jong. Similarly, the International Workers' Association (embracing unions of a libertarian and revolutionary bent) secretariat was moved to the Netherlands, but that did not prevent the organization's archives from falling into the hands of the Nazis.

In autumn 1933, Emil Zehner was replaced by Ferdinand Gotze, a member of the Saxony Chamber of Labor. Meanwhile in the autumn of 1934 Gotze, on the run from the Gestapo, turned up again in the west of Germany where support from the Dutch federation of the IWA (the NSV) had made it possible to establish an underground FAUD group. At the same time, and in all haste, an FAUD secretariat in exile had been set up in Amsterdam.

## Duisburg, liaison and agitation center

Up until the Nazis took power, laborer Franz Bunged had headed the Duisburg federation. He was interned in the Bogermoor concentration camp without any semblance of a trial in 1933. Bungert was released within a year but found it impossible to engage in even the least illegal activity because of the strict surveillance under which he was kept. His place was taken by Julius Nolden, a steelworker unemployed at the time who had been treasurer of the Rhineland Chamber of Labor. Nolden was also arrested by the Gestapo, who suspected that his job with an incineration plant was a cover for illegal contacts with other FAUD members.

In June 1933, shortly after he was released, Nolden met Karolus Heber, a member of the underground Erfurt directorate. The object of their meeting was to organize the clandestine escape of compromised colleagues to Holland and to launch a resistance organization in the Rhineland and Rhur districts. Nolden and his colleagues laid the groundwork for a network to smuggle people out to Amsterdam and distribute antifascist propaganda. It transpires from the court records that anti-Nazi pamphlets circulating at the time under cover of the title "Eat German fruit and stay healthy" were so popular among miners that they used to greet each other with: "Have you eaten German fruit as well?"

After 1935 and the improving economic position inside the country, it was increasingly difficult to keep an illegal anarcho-syndicalist organization afloat. Many comrades had found work again after years of unemployment and casual labor and were reluctant to involve themselves in active resistance. Gestapo terror did the rest. Furthermore, the support from Amsterdam dried up in 1935.

The outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in 1936 gave a boost to anarcho-syndicalist activity inside Germany. Nolden built up his contacts with Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Cologne, organized meetings and launched subscriptions to raise financial support for the Spanish comrades. At the same time, Simon Wehre, from Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), used the Rhineland Chamber of Labor's network to recruit volunteer technicians prepared to go to Spain.

In December 1936, the Gestapo, thanks to a spy planted within, managed to uncover the existence of groups in the cities of Munchengladbach, Dulken and Viersen. At the beginning of 1937, the political police rounded up 50 anarcho-syndicalists from Duisburg, Dusseldorf and Cologne. Nolden was among those arrested. A little later, further arrests were made, bringing the number of members of the outlawed FAUD in Gestapo clutches to 89. It took a year to build the case against them. These comrades were charged with "preparing acts of high treason" and they were brought before the courts in January and February of 1938.

Only six were not convicted for lack of evidence. The rest were sentenced to terms ranging from several months to six years' imprisonment. Julius Nolden was committed to the Lutteringhausen prison and remained there until the arrival of the Allies on April 19, 1945. On Pentecost Sunday of 1947 he met in Darmstadt with other comrades to establish the Federation of Libertarian Socialists (anarcho-syndicalists).

## Killing of militants

Several comrades were murdered in prison. The Duisburg lathe operator Emil Mahnert, according to the testimony of four other inmates, was hurled from two stories up by a police torturer. The bricklayer Wilhelm Schmitz died in prison on January 29, 1944, and the circumstances of his death have never been properly clarified. Ernst Holtznagel was dispatched to the notorious 999 punishment battalion, where he was killed. Michael Delissen from Munchengladbach was beaten to death by the Gestapo in December 1936. Anton Rosinke from Dusseldorf was murdered in February 1937.

In August 1946, the Dusseldorf anarcho-syndicalist Ernst Binder wrote: "Since mass resistance was not feasible in 1933, the finest members of the movement had to squander their energy in a hopeless guerrilla campaign. But if workers will draw from that painful experiment the lesson that only a united defence at the proper time is effective in the struggle against fascism, their sacrifices will not have been in vain."



# Fighting Fascism: Lessons from Italy

BY IAIN MCKAY

The election of Donald Trump came as a surprise to many, given the obvious demagoguery, incoherence and authoritarianism he exhibited as a candidate. It matters little that he lost the popular vote, the fact is that enough people in specific states were willing to vote for him – and now we all have to live with the outcome. The result of decades of right-wing glorification of the wealthy, calls to run the state as a business (i.e., as a dictatorship), and the like can now be seen in all their glory. A better argument for anarchism would be hard to find.

That does not mean, of course, passively awaiting the next election as the myth of democracy would have us believe. It means resisting – and there have been promising signs of that, such as lively town-hall meetings (which raises the question, why not make them permanent and so become a power no politician can ignore?). It has also been seen in protests against the worst of Trump supporters – the KKK, neo-Nazis and the rest of the so-called “alt-right.”

That Trump could not bring himself to read a simple prepared statement and instead ad-libbed about “both sides” shows that he did not want to alienate them. Sadly, significant numbers of Republican voters likewise cannot see the difference between fascism and resisting fascism. A significant part of America has lost its moral compass.

The events in Charlottesville bring home that resisting fascism is not only necessary but also dangerous. This can be seen from the rise of fascism in Italy after the First World War, something which was never inevitable and from which lessons can be learned.

## “A Preventative Counter-Revolution”

The rise of Mussolini cannot be viewed in isolation. After the end of the First World War there was a massive radicalization across Europe and the world. Union membership exploded, with strikes, demonstrations and agitation reaching massive levels. This was partly due to the war, partly to the apparent success of the Russian Revolution. Across Europe, anarchist ideas became more popular and anarcho-syndicalist unions grew in size as part of a general rise and growth of the left.

In Italy, the post-war ferment grew into a near revolution, with the rise of workers’ councils and the occupation of factories in 1920. The anarchists and syndicalists took an active, indeed, leading role in the movement as Errico Malatesta, who took part in these events, writes:

The metal workers started the movement over wage rates. It was a strike of a new kind. Instead of abandoning the factories, the idea was to remain inside without working ... Throughout Italy there was a revolutionary fervour among the workers and soon the demands changed their characters. Workers thought that the moment was ripe to take possession once [and] for all the means of production. They armed for defence ... and began to organise production on their own ... It was the right of property abolished in fact...; it was a new regime, a new form of social life that was being ushered in. And the government stood by because it felt impotent to offer opposition. (*Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* [Freedom Press, 1993], 134)

The socialists and their trade unions did not back the movement in spite of having talked of being revolutionary for decades, although groups and individuals within the party did (such as in

Turin, with Antonio Gramsci taking the lead – these would later split from the Socialists and form the Italian Communist Party). Faced with the hostility of the “official” labor movement, the occupations ended after four weeks.

Unsurprisingly, the promises given by the employers and state to end the occupations were not kept and “after the factories were evacuated” the government (obviously knowing who the real threat was) “arrested the entire leadership of the USI [Italian Syndicalist Union] and UAI [Italian Anarchist Union]. The socialists ... more or less ignored the persecution of the libertarians until the spring of 1921 when the aged Malatesta and other imprisoned anarchists mounted a hunger strike from their cells in Milan.” (Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* [Berg, 1999], 221-2) They were acquitted after a four-day trial.

This period of Italian history explains the growth of fascism in Italy. As Tobias Abse points out, “the rise of fascism in Italy cannot be detached from the events of the biennio rosso, the two red years of 1919 and 1920, that preceded it. Fascism was a preventive counter-revolution ... launched as a result of the failed revolution” (“The Rise of Fascism in an Industrial City,” David Forgacs (ed.), *Rethinking Italian fascism: Capitalism, populism and culture* [Lawrence and Wishart, 1986], 54) The term “preventive counter-revolution” was originally coined by the anarchist Luigi Fabbri, who correctly described fascism as “the organisation and agent of the violent armed defence of the ruling class against the proletariat, which, to their mind, has become unduly demanding, united and intrusive.”

The capitalists and rich landowners backed the fascists in order to teach the working class to know their place, aided by the state. They ensured “that it was given every assistance in terms of funding and arms, turning a blind eye to its breaches of the law and, where necessary, covering its back through intervention by armed forces which, on the pretext of restoring order, would rush to the aid of the fascists wherever the latter were beginning to take a beating instead of doling one out.” (Fabbri) To quote Abse:

The aims of the Fascists and their backers amongst the industrialists and agrarians in 1921-22 were simple: to break the power of the organised workers and peasants as completely as possible, to wipe out, with the bullet and the club, not only the gains of the biennio rosso, but everything that the lower classes had gained ... between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the First World War. (54)

The fascist squads attacked and destroyed anarchist and socialist meeting places, social centers, radical presses and Camera del Lavoro (local union councils). Thousands of individuals were attacked and murdered. However, even in the dark days of fascist terror, the anarchists resisted the forces of totalitarianism:

It is no coincidence that the strongest working-class resistance to Fascism was in ... towns or cities in which there was quite a strong anarchist, syndicalist or anarcho-syndicalist tradition. (Abse, 56)

## The Arditi del Popolo

The anarchists participated in, and often organized sections of, the Arditi del Popolo (The People’s Shock-troops), a working-class organization devoted to the self-defense of workers’ interests. The Arditi del Popolo organized and encouraged working-class resistance to fascist squads, often defeating larger fascist forces: for example,



“the total humiliation of thousands of Italo Balbo’s squadristi by a couple of hundred Arditi del Popolo backed by the inhabitants of the working class districts” in the anarchist stronghold of Parma in August 1922 (Abse, 56).

The Arditi del Popolo was the closest Italy got to the idea of a united, revolutionary working-class front against fascism, as had been suggested by Italian anarchists and syndicalists during the biennio rosso. This movement “developed along anti-bourgeois and anti-fascist lines, and was marked by the independence of its local sections.” (*Red Years, Black Years: Anarchist Resistance to Fascism in Italy* [ASP, 1989], 2) Rather than being just an “anti-fascist” organization, it was “not a movement in defense of ‘democracy’ in the abstract, but an essentially working-class organization devoted to the defense of the interests of industrial workers, the dockers and large numbers of artisans and craftsmen.” (Abse, 75) Unsurprisingly, the Arditi del Popolo “appear to have been strongest and most successful in areas where traditional working-class political culture was less exclusively socialist and had strong anarchist or syndicalist traditions, for example, Bari, Livorno, Parma and Rome.” (Antonio Sonnessa, “Working Class Defence Organisation, Anti-Fascist Resistance and the Arditi del Popolo in Turin, 1919-22,” *European History Quarterly* 33: 2 184)

However, both the socialist and communist parties withdrew from the organization. The socialists signed a “Pact of Pacification” with the fascists in August 1921. The communists “preferred to withdraw their members from the Arditi del Popolo rather than let them work with the anarchists.” (*Red Years, Black Years*, 17) Indeed, “[o]n the same day as the Pact was signed, *Ordine Nuovo* published a PCd’I [Communist Party of Italy] communication warning communists against involvement” in the Arditi del Popolo. Four days later, the Communist leadership “officially abandoned the movement. Severe disciplinary measures were threatened against those communists who continued to participate.” Thus by “the end of the first week of August 1921 the PSI, CGL and the PCd’I had officially denounced” the organization. “Only the anarchist leaders, if not always sympathetic to the programme of the [Arditi del Popolo], did not abandon the movement.” Indeed, the leading anarchist newspaper, *Umanita Nova*, “strongly supported” it “on the grounds it represented a popular expression of anti-fascist resistance and in defence of freedom to organise.” (Sonnessa, 195, 194)

However, in spite of the decisions by their leaders, many rank-and-file socialists and communists took part in the movement. The latter took part in open “defiance of the PCd’I leadership’s growing abandonment” of it. In Turin, for example, communists who took part in the Arditi del Popolo did so “less as communists and more as part of a wider, working-class self-identification ... This dynamic was re-enforced by an important socialist and anarchist presence.” The failure of the Communist leadership to support the movement shows the bankruptcy of Bolshevik organizational forms, which were unresponsive to the needs of the popular movement. Indeed, these events show the “libertarian custom of autonomy from, and resistance to, authority was also operated against the leaders of the workers’ movement, particularly when they were held to have misunderstood the situation at grass roots level.” (Sonnessa, 200, 198, 193)

The Communist Party failed to support the popular resistance to fascism. The Communist leader Antonio Gramsci argued that “the party leadership’s attitude on the question of the Arditi del Popolo ... corresponded to a need to prevent the party members from being controlled by a leadership that was not the party’s

leadership.” Gramsci added that this policy “served to disqualify a mass movement which had started from below and which could instead have been exploited by us politically.” (*Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926* [Lawrence and Wishart, 1978], 333) While less sectarian towards the Arditi del Popolo than other Communist leaders, “[i]n common with all communist leaders, Gramsci awaited the formation of the PCd’I-led military squads.” (Sonnessa, 196) In other words, the struggle against fascism was seen by the Communist leadership as a means of gaining more members and, when the opposite was a possibility, they preferred defeat and fascism rather than risk their followers becoming influenced by anarchism.

As Abse notes, “it was the withdrawal of support by the Socialist and Communist parties at the national level that crippled” the Arditi. (74) Thus “social reformist defeatism and communist sectarianism made impossible an armed opposition that was widespread and therefore effective; and the isolated instances of popular resistance were unable to unite in a successful strategy.” And fascism could have been defeated: “Insurrections at Sarzanna, in July 1921, and at Parma, in August 1922, are examples of the correctness of the policies which the anarchists urged in action and propaganda.” (*Red Years, Black Years*, 2-3) Abse confirms this analysis, arguing that

[w]hat happened in Parma in August 1922 ... could have happened elsewhere, if only the leadership of the Socialist and Communist parties thrown their weight behind the call of the anarchist Malatesta for a united revolutionary front against Fascism. (56)

As with libertarian calls for a united front during the near-revolutionary situation after the war, these calls were ignored.

Perhaps needless to say, the state verbally denounced the violence (on both sides, of course!) but primarily targeted those opposing the fascists as Fabbri noted:

Italian jails are filled with workers and the heaviest sentences rain down on workers who made the mistake in clashes of using violence to defend themselves from the fascists. Moreover, we have already seen the government’s stance as soon as the spontaneous initiative of the people came up with the idea of forming proletarian defence units which were dubbed the Arditi del Popolo. Outside of Rome ... the mere idea of setting up Arditi del Popolo chapters has been pre-emptively stamped out in the most vigorous fashion – through bans, threats, raids and arrests.

Fabbri also indicated “the police’s class function” and how fascist attacks “happened under the very eyes of huge police, carabinieri, Royal Guard and constabulary forces who would, after some initial sham opposition, let things proceed” while “chapters of the Arditi del Popolo are broken up and its members arrested for offences against the security of the state – or is the state fascism, perhaps? – merely for their intention to offer other than passive resistance to fascist violence.” Governmental edicts “trigger[ed] the imprisonment of many more workers as supposed Arditi del Popolo, whereas no action will be taken against the fascist action squads.”

In the end, fascist violence was successful and capitalist power maintained:

The anarchists’ will and courage were not enough to counter the fascist gangs, powerfully aided with material and arms, backed by the repressive organs of the state. Anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were decisive in some areas and in some industries, but only a similar choice of direct action on the parts of the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour [the reformist trade union] could have halted fascism.





CLIFFORD HARPER

(*Red Years, Black Years*, 1-2)

After helping to defeat the revolution, the Marxists helped ensure the victory of fascism.

### Conclusions for today

The rise of fascism confirmed Malatesta's warning at the time of the factory occupations: "If we do not carry on to the end, we will pay with tears of blood for the fear we now instil in the bourgeoisie." (quoted by Abse, 66) It is not surprising that when their privileges and power were in danger, the capitalists and the landowners turned to fascism to save them. This process is a common feature in history (to list just four examples: Italy, Germany, Spain and Chile). Moreover, capitalists have always hired private goons to break strikes and unions – American capitalists being at the forefront of that.

Yet there is no mass working class revolt – nor has there been for many decades. The neo-liberal onslaught started by Carter and intensified by Reagan has been successful – labor has been defeated to a large degree and wealth has flooded upwards (rather than "trickled down"). As such, there is no real equivalent of the ruling class's fears in the 1920s:

The anarchist Luigi Fabbri termed fascism a preventative counter-revolution; but in his essay he makes the important point that the employers, particularly in agriculture, were not so much moved by fear of a general revolution as by the erosion of their own authority and property rights which had already taken place locally: 'The bosses felt they were no longer bosses.' (Adrian Lyttelton, "Italian Fascism," *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* [Penguin, 1979], 91)

The rise of Trump has been somewhat driven, ironically, by those most subject to Republican policies – policies which Trump seeks to continue (under the usual rhetoric of tax reform). However, we should not stress that aspect of his support too much – he has always been more popular with the top-end of the wealth distribution. Most elements of the capitalist class seem happy enough to have the crazies in office so long as they can secure that agenda. Short-termism, perhaps, but there is no popular movement to disabuse them of such notions.

So the "alt-right" are currently not needed by the ruling class – but obviously it would be suicidal to ignore them on the hope (if that is the word!) that there is no upsurge in class struggle which would make their services more appealing to the elite. Lack of ruling class backing will not stop them from attacking black people, feminists, the left, strikers, etc. if they feel strong enough. So we

need to confront them; otherwise they will be emboldened by the lack of resistance, just as the Italian fascists were. And if we confront them – even verbally – we need to be able to defend ourselves, just as the most forward-looking of the Italian left did.

Similarly, we must remember that the state is not a neutral body and will seek to defend the powers and property of the few (even if we ignore any personal sympathies individual law enforcement officers have with the right). Any appeal to the state to pass laws restricting freedom of assembly, speech and so on will see them used primarily against the left and rebel workers. Such illusions must be dispelled.

While the obvious lesson from Italy is that we must unite with those seeking to defeat fascism, we must be watchful for two dangers.

First, that anti-fascism gets watered down so much that it forgets the roots of fascism in capitalism. Fascism rises, mostly, to defend capital but also to some degree because it offers false solutions to real problems. Any effective anti-fascism must provide a class analysis, a critique of capitalism, real solutions. This cannot be done if we seek a popular front and submerge this analysis. This does not mean isolation, quite the reverse as we must win others to our views, but any united front must be aware of the roots of fascism and how to counter its scapegoating with genuine alternatives. Urging people to simply vote for the lesser – but still neo-liberal – evil will not do it.

Second, we must be watchful for those on the left – primarily Leninists of various kinds – who will view any militant anti-fascist movement as merely a means for building their party. As the example of the Italian Communists shows, this can go so far as to undermine popular resistance if they think that is working against the interests of the vanguard. Popular resistance and organization needs to be viewed as a positive in and of itself, not as a means of building a party.

While learning from history, we must beware of mechanically applying what worked in the past. We are not living in Italy during the early 1920s. There is no mass libertarian movement with firm roots in workplaces and communities. The need is to build both and in this the Arditi del Popolo shows the way forward. It united those who saw the threat of fascism and were willing to act. However, it was also part of wider working class social movements – and worked with these to defeat the fascist gangs. Without this wider social base, any militant anti-fascist organization is in danger of being isolated and so defeated by the powers of the state.

### Further Reading

This article is based on section A.5.5 of *An Anarchist FAQ* vol. 1 (AK Press, 2008), which covers the near revolution in more detail.

Luigi Fabbri's *The Preventive Counter-Revolution* (<https://libcom.org/library/preventative-counter-revolution-luigi-fabbri>) is an excellent early (1921) account of the rise of fascism by a leading Italian anarchist.

M. Testa's *Militant Anti-Fascism: A Hundred Years of Resistance* (AK Press, 2015) has a useful chapter on the resistance to Mussolini.

Tom Behan's *The Resistible Rise of Benito Mussolini* (Bookmarks, 2003) should be avoided. While meant to be about the Arditi del Popolo, it is really about the Italian Communist Party and its errors. While it has some useful material, it was written by a member of the British SWP during their short-lived return to anti-fascist activity in the early 2000s and suffers as a result. See my critique "The irresistible correctness of anarchism" (<http://anarchism.pageabode.com/anarcho/the-irresistible-correctness-of-anarchism>).



# 160 Years of Libertarian

BY IAIN MCKAY

Many men, I know, speak of liberty without understanding it; they know neither the science of it, nor even the sentiment. They see in the demolition of reigning Authority nothing but a substitution of names or persons; they don't imagine that a society could function without masters or servants, without chiefs and soldiers; in this they are like those reactionaries who say: 'There are always rich and poor, and there always will be. What would become of the poor without the rich? They would die of hunger!'

Joseph Déjacque (*Down with the Bosses!* 5)

In 2008, I marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the use of the word "libertarian" by anarchists ("150 Years of Libertarian," *Freedom* 69, 23-4). That article recounted how, between 1858 and 1861, French exile and communist-anarchist Joseph Déjacque published the journal *La s, Journal du Mouvement Social* in New York. (Max Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, 75-6) It also sketched anarchist use of the term from that date onwards.

However, the previous year – 1857 – saw the first actual use of the word *libertaire* in the modern sense in an Open Letter he wrote to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first person to self-proclaim as an anarchist in 1840's seminal *What is Property?* It is of note beyond the coining of libertarian. First, Déjacque challenged Proudhon's sexism and argued that support for patriarchy is in contradiction to Proudhon's own stated principles. Second, the extension of Proudhon's critique of property beyond his market socialism to communist conclusions, predating the rise of anarchist-communism in the First International by over twenty years.

Unfortunately, in the United States "libertarian" has become associated with the far right by supporters of "free-market" capitalism. That defenders of the hierarchy associated with private property seek to associate the word with their authoritarian system is both unfortunate and unbelievable to any genuine libertarian. Worse, thanks to the power of money and the relatively small size of the anarchist movement in America, this appropriation of the term has become, to a large extent, the default meaning there. Somewhat ironically, this results in some right-wing "libertarians" complaining that we genuine libertarians have "stolen" their name in order to associate our socialist ideas with it!

Here I expand on my previous account and discuss why the right-wing appropriation of the word is wrong not only because of its history but also according to their own ideology. In doing so I show why the left should reclaim the term libertarian and why the right should refuse to use it. We also indicate that latter is optimistic at best despite it being consistent with their own ideology.

## Joseph Déjacque: "Be frankly, fully anarchist"

Joseph Déjacque (1821-1864) wrote in response to Proudhon's attack on the French feminist Jenny d'Héricourt (1809-1875) and entitled his 1857 critique "De l'être-humain mâle et femelle" (On the Male and Female Human Being). He is one of those figures who deserves better than just a passing mention or being relegated to a footnote in the histories of anarchism – he was a precursor of anarchist-communism whose fiery rhetoric and fierce logic remains largely unknown in the English-language movement.

Déjacque rightly denounced Proudhon for his repulsive sexism and showed how Proudhon's position was at odds with his own

principles. He invited him to become "frankly and completely an anarchist" by giving up all forms of authority and property – and so demonstrated that he was a much more astute reader of Proudhon than many others, then and since. The word libertarian was used to describe this consistent anarchism which rejected all private and public hierarchies along with property in the products of labor as well as the means of production.

To fully appreciate Déjacque's critique we must first sketch Proudhon's ideas.

Proudhon is best known for 1840's *What is Property?* and this book laid the foundations for his subsequent works as well as all forms of modern anarchism. As is well known, this work concluded that "property is theft." This is for two reasons. First, the common heritage of humanity – the land, the means of production – is appropriated by the few. Second, this results in a situation where the worker "has sold and surrendered his liberty" to the property-owner who acquires "the products of his employees' labor" and unjustly profits from their collective toil. If the "worker is proprietor of the value which he creates" then this does not occur under capitalism and to achieve it "all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor." So all workers "are proprietors of their products" while "not one is proprietor of the means of production." If the "right to product is exclusive" then "the right to means is common" for "[i]f the right of life is equal, the right of labor is equal, and so is the right of occupancy." (*Property is Theft!*, 117-8, 112, 95)

Less well known is the second conclusion, that "property is despotism." Property "violates equality by the rights of exclusion and increase, and freedom by despotism." Proprietor was "synonymous" with "sovereign" for he "imposes his will as law, and suffers neither contradiction nor control," for "each proprietor is sovereign lord within the sphere of his property." Anarchy, in contrast, was "the absence of a master, of a sovereign." As Proudhon put it in 1846: "Property, which should make us free, makes us prisoners. What am I saying? It degrades us, by making us servants and tyrants to one another." (133, 132, 135, 248)

Thus property is rejected for two interlinked reasons – it produces oppressive and exploitative relationships between people. The "abolition of man's exploitation of his fellow-man and abolition of man's government of his fellow-man" were "one and the same proposition" for "what, in politics, goes under the name of Authority is analogous to and synonymous with what is termed, in political economy, Property." These "two notions overlap one with the other and are identical." The "principle of AUTHORITY [was] articulated through property and through the State" and so "an attack upon one is an attack upon the other." Association had to replace both; otherwise people "would remain related as subordinates and superiors, and there would ensue two industrial castes of masters and wage-workers, which is repugnant to a free and democratic society." (503-6, 583)

Déjacque took aim at the great contradiction in Proudhon's ideas, namely his vigorous defense of patriarchy. Here was an association – the family – in which there would remain "subordinates and superiors," masters and servants. In contrast to his penetrating critique of property and state, this specific subordinate relationship was based on, and defended by, the crudest sexism.

As can be seen from his Open Letter, Déjacque is very famil-



iar with Proudhon's work, and what would annoy him. He starts with an obvious reference to the masthead of Proudhon's paper from the 1848 revolution, *Le Representant du Peuple* ("What is the Producer? Nothing. What should he be? Everything!") before proclaiming Proudhon a moderate ("*juste-milieu*") anarchist, "a liberal" rather than a "real anarchist" or "LIBERTARIAN," knowing that *juste milieu* ("middle way" or "happy medium") was used to describe centrist political philosophies that try to find a balance between extremes. It was associated with the French July Monarchy (1830–1848) which ostensibly tried to strike a balance between autocracy and democracy: "We will attempt to remain in a *juste milieu*, in an equal distance from the excesses of popular power and the abuses of royal power" (in the words of King Louis-Philippe).

So just as the tensions between monarchical principles and republican ideals was unsustainable and the regime was overthrown in the 1848 Revolution, so Déjacque hoped that the obvious contradictions between Proudhon's anarchy for the community and the workplace but patriarchy for the home would likewise be rejected in favor of a consistent anarchy. The notion that the family should be excluded from free and equal association was untenable, an affront to both logic and liberty. Hence libertarian – to place liberty within any association we may freely decide to join at the forefront.

His other innovation was to extend Proudhon's critique of property from the instruments of labor to the products of labor. While recognizing that Proudhon's market socialism – worker cooperatives selling their products to other workers – may be required immediately after a revolution, he argued twenty years before Kropotkin and Reclus that this was not the best we could aim for. Freedom was best defended by free access to both the means of life and the products created using them. As he put it in "Exchange," which appeared in *Le Libertaire* during 1858:

In principle, should the labourers have the produce of their labour? I do not hesitate to say: No! although I know that a multitude of workers will cry out. Look, proletarians, cry out, shout as much as you like, but then listen to me:

No, it is not the product of their labours to which the workers have a right. It is the satisfaction of their needs, whatever the nature of those needs.

To have the possession of the product of our labour is not to have *possession* of that which is proper to us, it is to have *property* in a product made by our hands, and which could be proper to others and not to us. And isn't all property theft? (15)

As would be expected with a short letter, his critique needs to be developed. His sketch of communist-anarchism is too dependent on harmonic coincidences in terms of equating production and consumption even if it does highlight an important issue—needs and deeds do not equate. Proudhon recognized that freedom required that the ownership of the means of life (workplace, land, sea) had to be common to avoid hierarchical relationships, Déjacque went further to argue that for a full life the products also had to be.

Before discussing the subsequent use of *libertaire*, we must note that for all his justified onslaught against Proudhon's sexism, Déjacque's defense of d'Héricourt was not completely free of it. Most obviously, it is marked by an ever-so-gallant desire to protect someone who could and did put Proudhon in his place by herself – d'Héricourt was a leading socialist of the Cabet faction, feminist activist, writer, a physician-midwife, a participant (like Déjacque and Proudhon) in the Revolution of 1848 who wrote replies to the sexist essays of Proudhon, amongst others.



CLIFFORD HARPER

### Libertarian or Anarchist?

Eleven years after Déjacque issued his challenge to Proudhon, André Léo, a feminist libertarian and future Communard, also pointed out the obvious contradiction to his French followers:

These so-called lovers of liberty, if they are unable to take part in the direction of the state, at least they will be able to have a little monarchy for their personal use, each in his own home... Order in the family without hierarchy seems impossible to them – well then, what about in the state? (quoted by Carolyn J. Eichner, 75)

So like Déjacque, Léo argued that Proudhon's critique of wage-labor and the state was equally applicable to family relations. Anarchists, to be consistent, cannot be blind to social ("private") hierarchies while denouncing economic and political ones. Unsurprisingly, almost all subsequent anarchists (including Bakunin and Kropotkin) recognized the need for consistency and so followed Déjacque and Léo in applying Proudhon's principles against his own contradictory application.

They also sought to apply their ideas within areas Proudhon likewise opposed, namely in the union movement. Thus we find Eugène Varlin as well as "advocat[ing] equal rights for women" also arguing that "the workers' own trade union organisations and strike activity" were "necessary to abolish capitalism" and these "societies of resistance and solidarity 'form the natural elements of the social structure of the future.'" (Robert Graham, *We do not fear anarchy, we invoke it*, 77, 128) These ideas were championed by Bakunin in the International Workers' Association and "now developed what may be described as modern anarchism" based on "promot[ing] their ideas directly amongst the labour organisations and to induc[ing] these unions to a direct struggle against capital, without placing their faith in parliamentary legislation." (Kropotkin, *Direct Struggle Against Capital*, 170, 165)

The next recorded use of "libertarian" was by a French regional anarchist congress at Le Havre (16–22 November 1880) which used the term "libertarian communism" while January the following year saw a French manifesto issued on "Libertarian or Anarchist Communism." The term "libertarian" quickly became an alternative to anarchist. In 1895 leading anarchists Sébastien Faure and Louise Michel published the newspaper *La Libertaire* in France. (Nettlau, 145, 162) Kropotkin the following year stated that "I cannot help believing that modern Socialism is forced to make a step towards libertarian communism." (*L'Anarchie: sa Philosophie, son Idéal*, 31) This pamphlet was translated into English the follow-



ing year and published in Britain and America. In Italy, Malatesta noted the same year that “the name libertarians” is one “accepted and used by all anarchists” and among those “who seek the abolition of capitalism” there are those who think “a new government needs to be formed – and these are the democratic or authoritarian socialists” and those “who want the new organisation to arise from the action of free associations – and these are the anarchist or libertarian socialists.” (*Complete Works* 3: 57, 252) In 1897 we also find Benjamin Tucker (a leading individualist anarchist) discussing “libertarian solutions” to land use in contrast to the capitalist “land monopoly” and looked forward to a time when “the libertarian principle to the tenure of land” was actually applied, based on occupancy and use. (*Liberty* 350: 5)

By 1899 the British anarchist Henry Glasse was discussing the issue, noting that the “term ‘Libertarian’ in place of ‘Anarchist’ seems to be used with increasing frequency” and concluded that the “newer term pleases me better.” (“Libertarian or Anarchist?” *Freedom*, January 1899) In 1913 Kropotkin was again using “libertarian Communism” to describe his ideas and goals as well as noting that this was how anarchist-communism “was named originally in France.” (*La Science Moderne et Anarchie*, 134, 140) The same year saw him argue in “The Anarchist Principle” that there is “the authoritarian current and the libertarian current – that is to say, the Anarchists and, in direct opposition to them, all the other political movements, whatever name they give themselves.” (*Direct*, 199)

So by the start of the twentieth century libertarian as an alternative to anarchist was well-established and in the 1920s communist-anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti was stating the obvious:

After all we are socialists as the social-democrats, the socialists, the communists, and the I.W.W. are all Socialists. The difference – the fundamental one – between us and all the other is that they are authoritarian while we are libertarian; they believe in a State or Government of their own; we believe in no State or Government. (Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, 274)

The most famous use of “libertarian communism” must be by the world’s largest anarchist movement, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT in Spain. After proclaiming its aim to be “libertarian communism” in 1919, the CNT held its national congress of May 1936 in Zaragoza, with 649 delegates representing 982 unions with a membership of over 550,000. One of the resolutions passed was “The Confederal Conception of Libertarian Communism” (José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution* 1: 103-10) This resolution on libertarian communism was largely the work of Isaac Puente, author of the widely reprinted and translated pamphlet entitled *Libertarian Communism* first published four years previously. That year, 1932, also saw the founding by anarchists of the Federación Ibérica de Juventudes Libertarias (Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth) in Madrid.

George Woodcock, in his history of anarchism written in 1962, indicated the use of the libertarian by anarchists and its origins in Déjacque and Faure (*Anarchism*, 233) and his account – which has the subtitle “*A History of libertarian ideas and movements*” – makes no mention of right-wing use of the word. More recently, Robert Graham states that Déjacque’s act made “him the first person to use the word ‘libertarian’ as synonymous with ‘anarchist’” while Faure and Michel were “popularising the use of the word ‘libertarian’ as a synonym for ‘anarchist.’” (*Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas* 1: 60, 231)

Libertarian, though, has been used by more than just anarchists. For example, in the late 1890s the ex-anarchist Francesco

Saverio Merlino proclaimed himself a “libertarian socialist” during his attempts to convince anarchists to embrace parliamentarianism (Malatesta, 290-1). In Britain between 1960 and 1992 the group Solidarity saw themselves as providing a “libertarian-socialist alternative” to “authoritarian class society” and as “part of a revolutionary libertarian tradition” they recognized that to “be meaningful the revolution to come will have to be profoundly libertarian.” (Maurice Brinton, *For Workers’ Power*, 157, 294, 377) Influenced by the French *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group and Cornelius Castoriadis, their self-managed socialism is hard to distinguish from anarchism and the group included anarchists, Marxists and those who eschewed both labels. Likewise, the expression “libertarian Marxist” is often used to describe dissident Marxists such as council communists (like Anton Pannekoek and Paul Mattick) who have come to conclusions similar to revolutionary anarchism.

So while “libertarian” did become broader than anarchist, it was still used by people on the left. Given this underlying similarity, anarchists were happy to share the term with other socialists and those – civil libertarians – who sought an increase in personal liberty and a reduction in social hierarchies and their power. Thus while all anarchists were libertarians, not all libertarians were anarchists – but they all refused to tolerate private hierarchies and their restrictions on individual liberty. The matter becomes different when “libertarian” is used to defend these private hierarchies.

## Property is Theft: On “Libertarian” Hypocrisy

So, just as all anarchists are socialists but not all socialists are anarchists, by the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Déjacque coining the phrase the situation was that while all anarchists were libertarians, not all libertarians were anarchists – but all were left-wing. Over the next 60 years this would change to such a degree that in America – and, to a lesser degree, Britain – “libertarian” now refers to the exact opposite of what it used to mean.

Murray Rothbard, a founder of the so-called “libertarian” right, sheds light on how this process started:

One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence [in the late 1950s] is that, for the first time in my memory, we, ‘our side,’ had captured a crucial word from the enemy ... ‘Libertarians’ ... had long been simply a polite word for left-wing [sic!] anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over, and more properly from the view of etymology; since we were proponents of individual liberty and therefore of the individual’s right to his property. (*The Betrayal of the American Right*, 83)

Let us recall what this proponent of “the individual’s right to his property” had to say about names and labels:

Every individual in the free society has a right to ownership of his own self and to the exclusive use of his own property. Included in his property is his name, the linguistic label which is uniquely his and is identified with him. A name is an essential part of a man’s identity and therefore of his property ... defense of person and property ... involves the defense of each person’s particular name or trademark against the fraud of forgery or imposture. (*Man, Economy, and State*, 670-1)

This “means the outlawing” of someone taking another’s name and pretending to be them as this would be “abusing the property right” of someone to “his unique name and individuality.” Likewise, “the use by some other chocolate firm of the Hershey label would be an equivalent of an invasive act of fraud and forgery.” This was



because a “name, as we have seen, is a unique identifying label for a person (or a group of persons acting co-operatively), and is therefore an attribute of the person and his energy” and so “is an attribute of a labour factor.” (671, 679) If someone “inherited or purchased” something which had been stolen then the thing “properly reverts back” to the original creator “or his descendants without compensation to the existing possessor of the criminally-derived ‘title.’” Thus, if a current title to property is criminal in origin, *and* the victim or his heir can be found, then the title should immediately revert to the latter.” (*The Ethics of Liberty*, 56)

The hypocrisy is obvious. According to his own ideology, Rothbard admitted to conducting “an invasive act of fraud and forgery” against “the individual’s right to his property.” Thus, if they had any actual principles beyond fetishizing property and being shrills for the economically powerful, his latter-day followers would stop using the term they stole and let the modern descendants of Joseph Déjacque – “anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety” – use what is rightly theirs.

It could be objected that anarchists do not accept Rothbard’s views of property. True, we advocate use rights rather than property rights: and we were still using the term “libertarian” – in America, for example, the communist-anarchist Libertarian League was active between 1954 and 1965 (Sam Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 74, 89). Yet Rothbard considers his prejudices and desires as a “natural law” and inherent in our “nature” as human beings. So, presumably like gravity, his “natural law” applies even if we do not believe in it – unless he views, as those expropriating native tribes did, socialists as somehow less than human (but, then, his “natural law” – unlike gravity – needs private police to enforce it).

So we know when and why the term “libertarian” was appropriated by the right – they saw it being used by the left and simply decided to steal it. Originally, this theft was on the fringes of political discourse but the appropriated usage has mostly displaced the original one in the United States – for example, Sam Dolgoff helped found the *Libertarian Labor Review* in 1986 but by 1999 this was renamed *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* to avoid its sellers having to continuously explain the origins and real meaning of libertarian!

How did they succeed in turning “libertarian” into its exact opposite? Partly, by the funding received by big business keen to secure its position, power and privileges in wider society: wealth skews the outcome in the so-called “marketplace of ideas” as in any capitalist market. Partly, by that most unlibertarian of tactics: the creation of a political party – the Libertarian Party – seeking to be elected to political office.

So if, for genuine anarchists, property is theft, for Rothbard theft is apparently property – just as he made an exception for the expropriation of the land from native peoples, so he made an exception for the term he wished to call his ideology. We should not be surprised by this hypocrisy for it mirrors the real history of capitalism – unlike Rothbard’s just-so stories of his imaginary idealized capitalism which has existed nowhere other than inside his fevered brow.

## Property is Despotism

If “libertarians” took their ideology seriously they would stop using the term “libertarian” – but of course they will not. Property rights are just for those who stole the commons, not for those who were using it. In this they reflect the reality rather than the rhetoric of the capitalism they worship. But what of Rothbard’s other claim, that “from the view of etymology” he and colleagues were entitled to steal the term from its creators and users? Are “libertarians”

actually libertarian?

The short answer is no. To prove this we could turn to anarchist thinkers who have long indicated the authoritarian relationships – the private hierarchies – that inequalities of wealth produce. However, we do not need to do this as Rothbard himself presents enough evidence to show the authoritarian nature of capitalism.

Thus we find Rothbard proclaim that the state “arrogates to itself a monopoly of force, of ultimate decision-making power, over a given territorial area.” Then, buried in the chapter’s end notes, he quietly admits that “[o]bviously, in a free society, Smith has the ultimate decision-making power over his own just property, Jones over his, etc.” (*Ethics*, 170, 173) Such is the power of “private property” for it can turn the bad (“ultimate decision-making power” over a given area) into the good (“ultimate decision-making power” over a given area). Indeed, Rothbard indicates the identical social relationships that anarchists argue mark the state and property:

*If the State may be said to properly own its territory, then it is proper for it to make rules for everyone who presumes to live in that area. It can legitimately seize or control private property because there is no private property in its area, because it really owns the entire land surface. So long as the State permits its subjects to leave its territory, then, it can be said to act as does any other owner who sets down rules for people living on his property. (170)*

Rothbard is not against authoritarianism *as such*, for if the state were a legitimate landlord or capitalist then its authoritarian nature would be fine. Indeed, we read in growing amazement as this “libertarian” quickly eliminates all freedoms worthy of the name because there are “no human rights which are not also property rights.” Thus “a person does not have a ‘right to freedom of speech’; what he does have is the right to hire a hall and address the people who enter the premise.” He “has no right to speak but only a request” that the owner “must decide upon.” In terms of freedom of assembly, owners “have the right to decide who shall have access to those streets” and “have the absolute right to decide on whether picketers could use their street” while “the employer can fire” a worker who joins a union “forth-with.” In short, no rights “beyond the property rights that person may have in any given case.” (113-6, 118, 132, 114) Yet the “freedom” of the boss to force all his employees to watch anti-union propaganda and fire those expressing their liberties of speech, assembly and organization is hardly that: it is power, authority, archy.

Ironically, Rothbard himself shows that this is the case when he utilized a hypothetical example of a country whose king, threatened by a rising “libertarian” movement, responses by “employ[ing] a cunning stratagem,” namely he “proclaims his government to be dissolved, but just before doing so he arbitrarily parcels out the entire land area of his kingdom to the ‘ownership’ of himself and his relatives.” Rather than taxes, people now pay rent and the king can “regulate the lives of all the people who presume to live on” his property as he sees fit. Rothbard then admits people would be “living under a regime no less despotic than the one they had been battling for so long. Perhaps, indeed, more despotic, for now the king and his relatives can claim for themselves the libertarians’ very principle of the absolute right of private property, an absoluteness which they might not have dared to claim before.” (54)

While Rothbard rejects this “cunning stratagem” he failed to note how this argument undermines his own claims that capitalism is the only system based upon liberty. As he himself argues, not only does the property owner have the same monopoly of power

*If, for genuine anarchists, property is theft, for Rothbard theft is apparently property...*



over a given area as the state, it is more despotic as it is based on the “absolute right of private property.” Indeed, he proclaims that the theory that the State owns its territory “makes the State, as well as the King in the Middle Ages, a feudal overlord, who at least theoretically owned all the land in his domain” (171) without noticing

*That property proclaims it is liberty yet produces subordination, proclaims it is based on labor's reward yet enriches the capitalist and landlord, are just two of the contradictions...*

that this makes the capitalist or landlord a feudal overlord within his so-called “libertarian” regime.

In short, Rothbard ends up defending extremely authoritarian organizations and relationships. More, these organizations and relationships are recognized as being identical to those created by the state. This is alleged to be “libertarian” because the hierarchies produced by property are “voluntary,” people “consent” to this authority. Yes, no one forces you to work for a specific employer and everyone has the possibility (however remote) of becoming an employer or landlord. Similarly, in a democratic state no one forces you to remain in a specific state and everyone has the possibility (however remote) of becoming a governor or politician. That some may become a (political or economic) ruler does not address the issue – are people free or not? It is a strange ideology that proclaims itself liberty-loving yet embraces factory feudalism and office oligarchy while rejecting the identical subservient relations of statism.

The context in which people make their decisions is important. Anarchists have long argued that, as a class, workers have little choice but to “consent” to capitalist hierarchy as the alternative is either dire poverty or starvation. Rothbard dismisses this by denying that there is such a thing as economic power (221-2). It is easy to refute such claims – by turning, yet again, to Rothbard's own arguments. Consider these comments about the abolition of slavery and serfdom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

The *bodies* of the oppressed were freed, but the property which they had worked and eminently deserved to own, remained in the hands of their former oppressors. With economic power thus remaining in their hands, the former lords soon found themselves virtual masters once more of what were now free tenants or farm labourers. The serfs and slaves had tasted freedom, but had been cruelly deprived of its fruits. (74)

So if “market forces” (“voluntary exchanges”) result in the few owning most of the property then this is unproblematic and raises no questions about the (lack of) liberty of the working class but if people are placed in exactly the same situation as a result of coercion then it is a case of “economic power” and “masters”!

So much for “each [would] enjoy absolute liberty” and rights “to one's liberty and property must be universal.” (41, 123) That Rothbard manages to refute himself in his own book is a case study in the power of ideology to blind its true believers.

### Liberty or Property?

To talk of “libertarian anarchism” as some do just shows ignorance of the history of both. Yet the issue is deeper than Rothbard. The knots he ties himself up in have their origins in the ideas of English philosopher John Locke which deeply influenced him and most defenders of capitalism.

Space precludes a detailed account of Locke's ideas beyond noting that on the apparently reasonable assumptions that land is given to humanity in common by God and labor is the property of the worker, he weaves a story which ends up with a few owning the means of life (“Masters”) and the rest having to sell their labor

to them (“Servants”). The few then incorporate their property as a joint-stock company to form and run a state whose sole role is to protect property (see C.B. MacPherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* or Carole Pateman's *The Problem of Political Obligation*).

That property was not acquired nor states formed in this manner is beside the point – Locke wishes us to accept the current distribution of wealth and power (the outcome of centuries of coercion) by means of a story of what could have produced this outcome. He then uses property in the person to justify (to use his words) “subordinate relations of wife, children, servants, and slaves.” Given that the rationale for all these forms of subjection were justified in liberal theory in the same manner – consent or contractual – Déjacque is right to argue that there was no logical reason to defend patriarchy any more than any other archy and so the anarchist critique cannot stop at the front-door of the home.

That property proclaims it is liberty yet produces subordination and authority, proclaims it is based on labor's reward yet enriches the capitalist and landlord, are just two of the contradictions of property exposed in Proudhon's critique (hence the pressing need for use rights – or possession – to replace property rights rather than, as state socialists do, the state becoming sole proprietor). This does not happen by accident – the more that liberty and labor is proclaimed the “property” of the individual, the more that liberty and labor can be alienated. In this way an ideology which proclaims its support for liberty ends up being the means of denying it: “Contracts about property in the person inevitably create subordination.” (Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 153)

This may seem counter-intuitive or contradictory but it is not. It was the aim of the whole theory. Locke was not seeking to undermine traditional hierarchies (beyond absolute monarchy) but rather to reinforce them. He did so by a “just-so” story whose desired conclusions – his favored socio-economic system, the one he benefited from – are reached by what appear reasonable steps. And here we have the crux of the matter, for in Locke's “just-so” story the state does rightfully own its property for it is a joint-stock corporation formed by landlords (servants are *in* civil society but not *of* civil society and have no say, just as employees are part of a company but its owners run it). Rothbard refuses to take this final step but gives no reason to reject this final chapter of the same fictional story. Both Locke and Rothbard seek to defend the inequalities of capitalism by convincing us to believe his story and ignore history.

This is the context of Locke's invocation of “consent” to justify subordination – all the land has been appropriated by the few and incorporated by them into states. The servant is free because they can change one master or state for another. Yet it is a particular kind of freedom that is invoked when it can be exemplified in subjection. Locke uses self-ownership and “consent” to justify inequalities in wealth, masters and servants, patriarchy, non-absolute monarchy, government by the wealthy few, contractual life-time slavery (which he termed “drudgery”), actual slavery, hereditary serfdom (in his *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina*) – the only thing it did not seem to allow was social relationships not rooted in hierarchy.

That Locke himself was a wealthy man is, of course, a coincidence. Just as it is a coincidence that this major investor in the slave trade, while proclaiming that an Englishman could never submit to the slavery produced by absolute monarchy, invented another story – like the one to justify appropriation of land and rationalize master-servant relations – in the form of a “just war.”



Slavery could be justified when the victors in a war started by those they have defeated offered the prisoners a choice: become a slave or die. So even absolute chattel slavery, with the power of life and death, is based on consent – and his investments safe and ethical.

Nor should we forget that Locke did allow servants to sell themselves to a lifetime of labor to the same master under the name “drudgery.” This is the logic which ends by “demonstrat[ing] that (civilized) slavery is nothing more than an extended wage-labour contract, and an exemplification, not the denial, of the individual’s freedom” for the “assumption that the individual stands to the property in his person, to his capacities or services, as any owner stands to his material property, enables the opposition between freedom and slavery to be dissolved. Civil slavery becomes nothing more than one example of a legitimate contract. Individual freedom becomes exemplified in slavery.” (Pateman, 72, 66) Hence the traditional anarchist description of capitalism as being marked by wage-slavery – Locke’s “drudgery” brings the nature of the hierarchies he defends into a clear light and, unsurprisingly, is usually passed over in embarrassed silence.

That Locke’s system of “freedom” produces private hierarchies is not surprising as it was precisely this which it aimed to justify, rationalize and defend. The same can be said for Rothbard – with the exception that he wrapped this unfree system under the stolen word “libertarian.” That both label subjugation as “freedom” is as useful as it is incredulous, for it allows Rothbard to claim in all seriousness that a person “cannot alienate ... his control over his own mind and body” while also asserting “workers can sell their labor service.” (*Ethics*, 135, 40) Carole Pateman states the obvious: “the contract in which the worker allegedly sells his labour power is a contract in which, since he cannot be separated from his capacities, he sells command over the use of his body and himself.” Selling a “labor service” inherently involves selling control over your mind and body for “what is required is that the worker labors as demanded. The employment contract must, therefore, create a relationship of command and obedience between employer and worker.” This “is primarily about away of creating social relationships constituted by subordination, not about exchange.” (151, 58) It produces authoritarian, not libertarian, social relationships:

contract doctrine has proclaimed that subjection to a master – a boss, a husband – is freedom. Moreover, the problem of freedom is misrepresented here. The question central to contract theory does not involve the general liberty to do as you please, but the freedom to subordinate yourself in any manner that you please. (Pateman, 146)

Thus we usually hear the loudest cries for liberty from those with substantial power over others – from landlords over tenants, bosses over wage-workers and husbands over wives who promise to “love, honour and obey” – or the well-paid agents of the think-tanks they fund. This explains the apparently strange sight of “libertarians” associating with conservatives. The latter seek to defend traditional hierarchies (particularly those associated with the private sphere) while the former seek to defend private hierarchies associated with wealth. These have a significant overlap – and a common basis in subordination rather than freedom. They both defend the freedom of the powerful to rule those subjugated to them and oppose the freedom of the subjugated to resist – whether by direct action or by political action.

Rather than the abolition of politics, “libertarianism” is the merging of political power with property. The landlord would become the actual lord, the employer’s power bolstered by his private police – for this kind of individualist may “begin with a

severe criticism of the State but end by recognising its functions in full in order to maintain the monopoly of property, which the State is always the true protector.” (Kropotkin, *Science*, 64) That the provision of these functions may be privatized does not change its role for someone

who intends to retain *for himself* the monopoly of any piece of land or property, or any other portion of the social wealth, will be bound to look for some authority which could guarantee to him possession ... to enable him to compel others to work for him ... And then he will NOT be an Anarchist: he will be an authoritarian.” (Kropotkin, *Direct*, 203)

### **‘I can neither sell nor alienate my liberty’**

As Rothbard himself shows, capitalism offers no guarantee of freedom to anyone except owners of capitalist private property. It was in recognition of this reality that Proudhon argued that “if the liberty of man is sacred, it is equally sacred in all individuals; that, if it needs property for its objective action, that is, for its life, the appropriation of material is equally necessary for all” and so “those who do not possess today are proprietors by the same title as those who do possess; but instead of inferring therefrom that property should be shared by all, I demand, in the name of general security, its entire abolition.” (96, 91) Kropotkin states the obvious:

In today’s society, where no one is allowed to use the field, the factory, the instruments of labour, unless he acknowledge himself the inferior, the subject of some Sir – servitude, submission, lack of freedom, the practice of the whip are *imposed* by the very form of society. By contrast, in a communist society which recognises the right of everyone, on an egalitarian basis, to all the instruments of labour and to all the means of existence that society possesses, the only men on their knees in front of others are those who are by their nature voluntary serfs. Each being equal to everyone else as far as the right to well-being is concerned, he does not have to kneel before the will and arrogance of others and so secures equality in all personal relationships with his co-members. (*Science*, 163)

Property results in workers being “compelled to sell his labour (and consequently, to a certain degree, his personality)” and so “staying free is, for the working man who has to sell his labour, an impossibility and it is precisely on account of that impossibility that we are anarchists.” (Kropotkin, *Direct*, 203, 160) This is why the French syndicalist Émile Pouget, echoing Proudhon, argued that:

Property and authority are merely differing manifestations and expressions of one and the same ‘principle’ which boils down to the enforcement and enshrinement of the servitude of man. Consequently, the only difference between them is one of vantage point: viewed from one angle, slavery appears as a PROPERTY CRIME, whereas, viewed from a different angle, it constitutes an AUTHORITY CRIME. (*No Gods, No Masters*, 427)

This means how we organize is what matters, for “man in isolation can have no awareness of his liberty. Being free for man means being acknowledged, considered and treated as such by another man. Liberty is therefore a feature not of isolation but of interaction, not of exclusion but rather of connection.” (Michael Bakunin, *Selected Works*, 147) So to count as genuinely libertarian, it is necessary but not sufficient for a group to be freely joined – otherwise you end up with such obvious nonsense as voluntary slavery being “libertarian” – it must also be run by all its members, it must be an association and not a hierarchy:



organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast ... Having therefore to join with other humans ... he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity. (*Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, 84-5)

*'Libertarians'  
"want liberty to  
still further crush  
and oppress the  
people; liberty to  
enjoy their plunder  
without fear of the  
State's interfering  
with them..."*

Freedom of association is not enough – freedom within association is just as important for “it is the ideas of individual freedom which we bring with us to an association which determine the more or less libertarian character of that association.” (Kropotkin, *Direct*, 639) What specific economic arrangements would exist would vary – on the basis of workers’ control of their workplaces anarchists have supported many different economic systems. Proudhon advocated mutualism (distribution according to deed), others – starting with Déjacque – libertarian communism (distribution according to need) with the “single proviso (which is implicit, since without it anarchy would be impossible)” that “communism be voluntary and so organised to leave scope for other living arrangements.” (Malatesta, *Collected Works* 3, 261) However, the abolition of private hierarchies is required for it to be genuinely libertarian:

Liberty is inviolable. I can neither sell nor alienate my liberty; every contract, every condition of a contract, which has in view the alienation or suspension of liberty, is null: the slave, when he plants his foot upon the soil of liberty, at that moment becomes a free man. ... Liberty is the original condition of man; to renounce liberty is to renounce the nature of man: after that, how could we perform the acts of man? (Proudhon, 92)

Given what libertarian originally meant, its opposition to both public hierarchies (the state) and private hierarchies (property, patriarchy, racism), it is easy to understand why the current situation of “libertarian” being used to describe the ideology anarchism was created fighting – Lockean liberalism – is so deplorable to anarchists. Particularly as Rothbard himself presents more than enough evidence to show that the libertarian critique of capitalism is correct.

The appropriation of “libertarian” by the right is just “primitive accumulation” or “immanent domain” applied to socio-political theory – the current users of, say, land are not using it as others think they should so it must be taken from them by others who will use it better. Locke’s original theory was postulated, in part, to justify the expropriation of native land by western settlers/invasers. Rothbard, likewise, concluded that the people who coined and used the term libertarian were not “really” libertarians, were not using it in the right way, so he and his supporters were justified in taking it over.

Interestingly, Rothbard (in an unpublished and at times extremely inaccurate article entitled “Are Libertarians ‘Anarchists?’” written around the same time he stole the term “libertarian”) stated that we must “conclude that we are not anarchists, and that those who call us anarchists are not on firm etymological ground and are being completely unhistorical.” For anarchism “arose in the nineteenth century, and since then the most active and dominant anarchist doctrine has been that of ‘anarchist communism’ an ‘apt term’ for ‘a doctrine which has also been called ‘collectivist anarchism,’ ‘anarcho-syndicalism,’ and ‘libertarian communism’ and

so “it is obvious that the question ‘are libertarians anarchists?’ must be answered unhesitatingly in the negative. We are at completely opposite poles.” As for the individualist anarchists (who also tended to call themselves socialists, incidentally), they “possessed socialistic economic doctrines in common” with the others. This was “probably the main reason” why the “genuine libertarians” of this era “never referred to themselves as anarchists” (*Strictly Confidential*, 32, 27, 30, 31) – not that they referred to themselves as libertarians either.

Of course, Rothbard changed his mind and not content with stealing “libertarian” also decided to proclaim his ideology that oxymoron “anarcho-capitalism.” Yet anarchism, regardless of dictionary definitions, was never opposed to just the state. As Kropotkin summarized, the origin of the anarchist idea was “criticism of hierarchical organisations and authoritarian conceptions in general.” (*Science*, 58) Ironically, Rothbard himself shows why a non-socialist “libertarian” theory ends up “contradicting itself, [and] would turn into aristocracy and tyranny” (Malatesta, *Collected Works* 3: 293). To fixate on political authority at the expense of these other – apparently more contractual – ones is ideological fetishism at its worse.

In short, “libertarians” suggest that voluntary subjugation – driven by economic necessity – equals liberty. But subjugation is still unfreedom, voluntary hierarchy still *archy*, consented authoritarian relationships still authority. This is a degradation of our ideas of freedom for it suggests that the only issue with, say, dictatorship and slavery is that they are involuntary. Yet we find Robert Nozick arguing just that – not only can someone “sell himself into slavery” but also “if one starts a private town, on land whose acquisition did not and does not violate the Lockean proviso, persons who chose to move there or later remain there would have no *right* to a say in how the town was run.” (*Anarchy, State and Utopia*, 371, 270) The ease with which “libertarians” can embrace dictatorship and slavery should raise questions of over the nature of the liberty they claim to champion (alongside Carole Pateman, David Ellerman is also of note – as seen by his *Property and Contract in Economics* – in recognizing the true nature of Nozick’s Lockean ideology). That so many others were willing to accept the use of “libertarian” by defenders of slavery and dictatorship says much about the state of intellectual discourse in an unequal society.

So right-wing use of libertarian is also “completely unhistorical” and “not on firm etymological ground.” It would be less confusing – and consistent with their own stated principles – if they were to change their name to something more appropriate.

## Libertaire or Libertarienne?

Now, do not get confused. It is possible to argue that some people should rule others, that some people – by some favored criteria – are just better than others and so rightly should govern them, that specific forms of hierarchy are fine, and so on. That can be a consistent, if wrong, ideology. What is not acceptable is to call such a system “anarchist” or “libertarian” – particularly when these terms were coined expressly against the notion that having wealth gives you that right.

In France, where the anarchist movement cannot be so easily ignored as in America or Britain, the free-market right have been forced to call their ideology “libertarianisme” and themselves as “libertariens” – *rien*, of course, being French for “nothing” or “nought” and so suggesting that it has nothing to do with liberty. So rather than a single entry for two distinctly different – nay, opposed – set of ideas with a distinctly different origin and aims as on the English-language Wikipedia, the French site has two



entries: one for libertaire and one for libertarianisme.

It is well beyond time for the same to occur in the English-language. So what would be an appropriate name for these so-called “libertarians” of the right? They could call it voluntarism, a term coined by English liberal Auberon Herbert in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As well as using a term invented by their own ideological tradition, it is more appropriate ideologically as they support all forms of voluntary arrangements regardless of their internal liberties. Yet that raises questions of how “voluntary” an agreement is if a few own the bulk of resources in a society. As individualist anarchist Victor Yarros put it:

A system is voluntary when it is voluntary all round ... not when certain transactions, regarded from certain points of view, appear voluntary. Are the circumstances which compel the labourer to accept unfair terms law-created, artificial, and subversive of equal liberty? That is the question, and an affirmative answer to it is tantamount to an admission that the present system is not voluntary in the true sense. (*Liberty* 184: 2)

Yarros denounced those who “want liberty to still further crush and oppress the people; liberty to enjoy their plunder without fear of the State’s interfering with them,” liberty “to summarily deal with impudent tenants who refuse to pay tribute for the privilege of living and working on the soil.” (*Liberty* 102: 4)

Rothbard himself – when discussing the abolition of slavery and serfdom – let the cat out of the bag by admitting that economic power exists when the means of production are appropriated by the few, as under even the capitalism of a “just-so” story. As Rothbard suggested, the Lockean Proviso that land can only be appropriated by labor when “there is enough, and as good, left in common for others” may “lead to the outlawry of all private property of land, since one can always say that the reduction of available land leaves everyone else ... worse off.” (*Ethics*, 240) So “voluntarism” may not be best as it still leads to awkward questions about the sanctity of property and the social relationships it generates. Appropriation by the few inevitably leads to the liberty of the many being worse off – which should be the key criteria for an ideology proclaiming itself “libertarian,” but is not for the all-too-obvious reasons we have indicated.

Perhaps we could take a leaf from socialist history, for most modern-day “libertarians” of the right (following Rothbard) advocate forming political parties, standing in elections and taking political office to ensure that the state disappears (or, as their ideals rarely appeal, trying to take over existing right-wing ones, such as the British Conservative and American Republican parties, and smuggling in their changes that way). In short, a classical Marxist strategy. This leads to an obvious label for their ideology: marxo-capitalism. It could be objected that their economic ideas are completely opposed and that they seek to privatize, not nationalize, but that did not stop their appropriation of “libertarian” or “anarchist.” They could explain that marxo-capitalism obviously differs from “classical” Marxism (marxo-socialism, if you like) but shares a common desire to utilize “political action” to ensure that the state “withers away” (at least to their own satisfaction, if not to anyone else’s).

Regardless of the obvious accuracy of this label we doubt that it will be viewed favorably and enough on the left would rush to dispute it – unlike for anarchism and libertarian, when Marxists for obvious reasons had no objections to their rivals on the left being associated with the far-right. Carole Pateman suggests “con-

tractarian” for she was well aware of the real history of libertarian: I shall refer to [this] ... as *contractarian* theory or *contractarianism* (in the United States it is usually called libertarianism, but in Europe and Australia ‘libertarian’ refers to the anarchist wing of the socialist movement; since my discussion owes something to that source I shall maintain un-American usage). (*The Sexual Contract*, 14)

But contracts take place once property is in place and, moreover, property is their core principle – liberty like labor being considered as the property of an individual – so propertarian would be best. This has the advantage of warning others of which side they will take in a conflict between liberty and property and so avoid that obvious confusion non-propertarians feel when the propertarian supports authoritarian social relationships and (private) restrictions on fundamental liberties.

Interestingly, Ursula Le Guin used the term in her 1974 classic of anarchist science-fiction, *The Dispossessed*. One of the anarchist characters notes that inhabitants of Anarres (the communist-anarchist moon) “want nothing to do with the propertarians” of Urras. Urras is a capitalist world and the anarchist protagonist, Shevek, does discover some people who describe themselves as “libertarian” but these declare themselves close to communist-anarchism (asked whether they are anarchists they reply: “Partly. Syndicalists, libertarians ... anti-centralists”). (*The Dispossessed*, 70, 245) It should be noted that “archist” and “propertarian” is used pretty much interchangeably in *The Dispossessed* to describe Urras, showing clear understanding of, and links to, Proudhon’s argument that property was both “theft” and “despotism.”

Yet regardless of the actual name decided upon, they should not call themselves libertarian for both historical reasons and “from the view of etymology” – and if the propertarians took their stated principles seriously they would join us in so doing.

## Against Private Tyranny

As Noam Chomsky summarizes, “libertarianism” is marked by “dedication to free market capitalism, and has no connection with the rest of the international anarchist movement” which “commonly called themselves libertarian socialists, in a very different sense of the term ‘libertarian.’” It is a “quite different thing and different development, in fact [it] has no objection to tyranny as long as it is private tyranny.” (*Chomsky on Anarchism*, 235)

Today, 160 years after Déjacque coined the term in its modern sense and from which current (valid and invalid) usages derive, we anarchists and other libertarian socialists should reclaim the word and its original meaning.

Given the origins of the word “libertarian” and their own stated principles, the naïve would think that the right would stop using the term. Yet from Locke onwards, “property” has been used to justify subjugation, exploitation, oppression and the stealing of resources used by others. Worse, the principles of the propertarians – if taken seriously – refute themselves and show why their appropriation of the term is wrong. They should help us reclaim what is rightfully ours and stop using the term Rothbard admitted they stole.

Not only is it wrong, it should be resisted. Writing in the 1980s, Murray Bookchin noted that in the United States the “term ‘libertarian’ itself, to be sure, raises a problem, notably, the specious identification of an anti-authoritarian ideology with a straggling movement for ‘pure capitalism’ and ‘free trade.’ This movement never created the word: it appropriated it from the anarchist movement of the [nineteenth] century. And it should be recovered by



those anti-authoritarians ... who try to speak for dominated people as a whole, not for personal egotists who identify freedom with entrepreneurship and profit." Thus anarchists should "restore in practice a tradition that has been denatured by" the free-market right. (*The Modern Crisis*, 154-5) This necessary task has become harder in the intervening years but that is no reason to rise to the challenge, for Déjacque's conclusions are as true as ever:

- Property is the negation of liberty.
- Liberty is the negation of property.
- Social slavery and individual property, this is what authority affirms.
- Individual liberty and social property, that is the affirmation of anarchy. (17)

So, considered in terms of our political, social and economics ideas, it is unsurprising that anarchists have been using the word libertarian for 160 years and regardless of the attempts by others ignorant of both the history of that term and the reality of capitalism to appropriate it for their hierarchical and authoritarian ideology, we will continue to use the term in the original sense of seeking freedom for all and the ending of all hierarchical and authoritarian institutions and social relations.

# On the Male and Female Human-Being

Open Letter to P.J. Proudhon

BY JOSEPH DÉJACQUE

(TRANSLATED BY IAIN MCKAY)

What is man? *nothing* – What is woman? *nothing* – What is the human being? – EVERYTHING

From the depths of Louisiana, where the ebb and flow of exile deported me, I read in a United States journal, *Revue de l'Ouest*, a fragment of the correspondence between you, P.J. Proudhon, and a woman d'Héricourt.

The few words of Madam d'Héricourt quoted in that paper made me fear the female antagonist does not have the strength – polemically speaking – to struggle with her brutal and male adversary.

I know nothing of Madam d'Héricourt, nor of her writings, if she writes, nor of her position in the world, nor of her person. But to argue well with women, as to argue well with men, spirit is not enough; one must have seen much and reflected much. He should, I believe, have felt his personal passions run into all corners of society; from the caverns of misery to the peaks of fortune; from the silvery summits from which the avalanche of happy vice is shaken in a compact mass, to the bottom of the ravines where sickly debauchery rolls. Then logic, that spark of truth, could spring forth from this human stone thus polished by impact after impact.

I should like to see the question of the emancipation of woman dealt with by a woman who has loved a lot, and loved variedly, and who, by her past life, belonged to the aristocracy and the proletariat, especially to the proletariat: for the woman of the garret is more capable of penetrating by sight and thought into the heart of the formal, or secret, luxurious life of the great lady than a lady of the lounge is able to envisage the life of deprivation, visible or hidden, of the daughter of the people.

However, in the absence of this other Magdalene spreading the fertile tears of her heart at the feet of crucified Humanity and the

striving of her soul for a better world; in the absence of this voice of civilised repentance, a believer in Harmony, an anarchic daughter; in the absence of this woman loftily and openly repudiating all the prejudices of sex and race, of law and customs, that still bind us to the previous world; well! I, a human being of the male sex, I will try to discuss with and against you, Aliboron-Proudhon, this question of the emancipation of woman which is none other than the question of the emancipation of human beings of both sexes.

Is it really possible, famed publicist, that under your lion's hide there is so much nonsense?

You who have such powerful revolutionary heartbeats for everything in our societies concerning the labour of the arm and the stomach, you have no less fiery outbursts, but of a complete reactionary stupidity, for everything related to the labour of the heart, the labour of feeling. Your vigorous and uncompromising logic in matters of industrial production and consumption is no more than a frail reed without strength in matters of moral production and consumption. Your virile intellect, complete for everything that relates to man is as though castrated when it comes to woman. Hermaphrodite brain, your thought has the monstrousness of two sexes within the same cranium, the enlightened-sex and the benighted-sex, and twists and turns upon itself in vain without being able to bring forth social truth.

A masculine Joan of Arc who, it is said, has kept your virginity intact for forty years, the pickling of love has ulcerated your heart; rancorous jealousies seep out; you cry out "War on women!" like the Maid of Orleans cried: "War on the English!" – The English burned her alive ... Women have made you a husband, O saintly man, long a virgin and still a martyr!

Hold on, father Proudhon, would you like me to tell you: when you speak of women, you remind me of a schoolboy who talks very loudly and very strongly, willy-nilly, and with impertinence to give himself airs of knowing them and who, like his adolescent listeners, does not have the slightest clue.

After forty years profaning your flesh in solitude, from wet-dream to wet-dream, you have arrived at publicly profaning your intelligence, elaborating its impurities and besmirching woman.

Is this then, Proudhon-Narcissus, what you call manly and honest civility?

I quote your words:

"No, Madame, you know nothing of your sex; you do not know the first thing about the issue that you and your honourable fellow league members agitate about with so much noise and so little success. And if you do not understand this question: if, in the eight pages of replies that you have made to my letter there are forty fallacies, that is as I told you, precisely because of your *sexual infirmity*. I mean by this term, whose exactness is perhaps not beyond reproach, the quality of your understanding which allows you to grasp the relationship between things only so far as we men place it at your fingertips. There is in you, in the brain as well as in the belly, a certain organ incapable by itself of overcoming its native inertia and which the male mind alone is capable of making function, and even then it does not always succeed. Such, madam, is the outcome of my direct and positive observations; I give it to your obstetrical sagacity and leave you to calculate its incalculable consequences for your thesis."

But – old boar who is merely a pig – if it is true, as you say, that woman cannot give birth from the brain as from the belly without the assistance of man – and this is true – it is equally true – the thing is reciprocal – that man cannot produce from the flesh



or from the intellect without the assistance of woman. This is logic and good logic master Madelon-Proudhon, that a student, who has always also been a disobedient subject, may well snatch from your own hands and throw back in your face.

The emancipation or non-emancipation of woman, the emancipation or the non-emancipation of man: what is there to say? Can there – naturally – be rights for the one that are not rights for the other? Is the human being not the human being in the plural as in the singular, the feminine as in the masculine? Is it not to change nature to sunder the sexes? And are the drops of rain falling from the cloud any less raindrops whether these droplets fall through the air in smaller or larger numbers, whether they are one size or another, this male configuration or that female configuration?

To place the question of the emancipation of woman in line with the question of the emancipation of the proletarian, this man-woman, or, to put it differently, this human-slave – flesh for the harem or flesh for the factory – this is understandable, and it is revolutionary; but to put it opposite and below that of man-privilege, oh! then, from the point of view of social progress, it is meaningless, it is reactionary. To avoid all ambiguity, it is the emancipation of the human being that should be spoken of. In these terms the question is complete; to pose it thus is to solve it: the human being, in its everyday rotations, gravitates from revolution to revolution towards its ideal of perfectibility, Liberty.

But man and woman thereby walking with the same step and the same heart, united and fortified by love, towards their natural destiny, the anarchic-community; but all despotism annihilated, all social inequalities levelled; but man and woman thereby entering – arm in arm and face to face – into this social garden of Harmony; but this group of human-beings, dream of happiness achieved, a lively picture of the future; but all these egalitarian murmurings and all these egalitarian radiances jar in your ears and make you blink. Your understanding tormented by petty vanities makes you see the man-statue erected upon woman-pedestal for posterity, as in previous ages the man-patriarch stood over the woman-servant.

Whipper of woman, serf of the absolute man, writer Proudhon-Haynau, who has as a knout the word, like the Croatian executioner, you seem to enjoy all the lubricious lecheries of lust in stripping your beautiful victims of torture on paper and flagellating them with your invectives. Moderate [*juste-milieu*] anarchist, a liberal and not a LIBERTARIAN, you want free trade for cotton and candles and you advocate protectionist systems for man against woman in the circulation of human passions; you cry out against the high barons of capital and you wish to rebuild the high barony of the male upon the female vassal; bespectacled logician, you see man through the lens which magnifies objects and woman through the one that diminishes them; myopic thinker, you can only perceive what is poking you in the eye in the present or in the past and can discover nothing of what is elevated and distant, what anticipates the future: you are a cripple!

Woman, know this, is the mover of man just as man is the mover of woman. There is not an idea in your deformed brain, as in the brains of other men, that has not been fertilized by woman; not an action of your arm nor of your intellect that has not had as its objective attracting the attention of a woman, of pleasing her, even those that seem the most contradictory, even your insults. Everything beautiful that man has made, everything great that man has produced, all the masterpieces of art and industry, the discoveries of science, the titanic ascents into the unknown, all the achievements and all the aspirations of the male genius are

attributable to woman who imposes them on him, like the queen of the tournament on a knight in exchange for a favor or a sweet smile. All of the heroism of the male, all his physical and moral worth comes from this love. Without woman, he would still be crawling on his belly or on all fours, he would still be grazing weeds or roots; he would have the same intelligence as the ox, as the beast; he is something higher because woman told him: Be it! It is her will that created him, what he is today, and it is to satisfy the sublime demands of the feminine soul that he has attempted to accomplish the most sublime things!

This is what woman has made of man; let us now see what man has made of woman.

Alas! to please her lord and master she did not need a great expenditure of intellectual and moral strength. Provided that she mimics the monkey in her expressions and mannerisms; that she should fasten beads or trinkets to neck and ears; that she should dress in ridiculous rags and pad her hips like a mother Gigogne or a Hottentot Venus with the aid of crinoline or wicker; provided she could hold a fan or handle the sieve; that she devotes herself to tinkling on a piano or boiling the pot; that is all that her sultan asked of her, all that was needed to put the male soul into jubilation, the alpha and omega of the desires and aspirations of man. That done, woman conquered the handkerchief.

She who, finding such a role and such a success as shameful, wished to show good taste and grace, to join merit to beauty, to provide evidence of her heart and intelligence, was pitilessly stoned by the multitude of Proudhons past and present, pursued by the name blue-stocking or some other imbecilic sneer and forced to withdraw into herself. For this mob of heartless and brainless men, she had sinned by having too much heart and too much intelligence: they stoned her; and very rarely has she met with the man-type who, taking her by the hand, said to her: woman, arise, you are worthy of love and worthy of Liberty.

No, what man, that is to say he which usurps that name, needs is not a woman in all her physical and moral beauty, a woman of elegant and artistic form, with a haloed face of grace and love, with an active and tender heart, keen thought, with the soul of a poetic and perfect humanitarian; no, what this simpleton gawker at funfairs needs is a waxwork in rouge and feathers; what this bestial gastronome, in ecstasy before the stalls of the butchers, needs, I tell you, is a haunch of veal decorated with lace! So much so that, satisfied by the man whom she found so moronic, indifferent to the one in whom she searched in vain for the organ of sentiment, woman – it is history that tells us this, I want to believe it is a fable, a tale, a Bible – woman – oh! cover yourselves, chaste eyes and chaste thoughts – woman have gone from biped to quadruped... An ass for an ass, it was natural, after all, that she let herself be seduced by the bigger animal. Then finally, as nature had endowed her with moral faculties too robust to be broken by fasting, she turned away from Humanity and sought in the temples of superstition, in religious aberrations of the mind and the heart, nourishment for the passionate aspirations of her soul. In the absence of the man she has dreamt of, she has given her feelings of love to an imaginary god and, for feelings, the priest has replaced the ass!

Ah! If there are so many abject female creatures in the world and so few women, men whom should we blame? Dandin-Proudhon, what are you complaining about? You wanted it...

And yet you, you personally, I acknowledge, have delivered formidable blows in the service of the Revolution. You have cut





ON THE BARRICADES, PARIS COMMUNE. CLIFFORD HARPER

deeply to the core of the age-old trunk of property and sent splinters flying into the distance; you have stripped the thing of its bark and you have exposed it in its nakedness to the eyes of the proletarians; on your way, you have snapped and toppled, like so many dried branches or dead leaves, the powerless authoritarian rebuttals, the revamped Greek theories of the constitutional socialists, your own included; you have brought with you, in a breakneck race through the twists and turns of the future, the whole pack of moral and physical appetites. You have blazed a trail, you have made others do likewise; you are weary, you want to rest; but the voice of logic is there to oblige you to pursue your revolutionary deductions, to march forward, always onwards, disdainful of the fateful warning, for fear of feeling the fangs of those who have legs rip into you.

Be frankly, fully anarchist and not one-quarter anarchist, one-eighth anarchist, one-sixteenth anarchist, as one is a quarter, an eighth, one-sixteenth partner in trade. Press on to the abolition of contract, the abolition not only of the sword and of capital, but of property and authority in every form. Arrive at the anarchic-community, that is to say, the social state where everyone would be free to produce and to consume at will and according to his fancy, without controlling anybody or being controlled by anyone else; where the balance between production and consumption would naturally be established, not by preventive and arbitrary constraint by the hands of others but through the free circulation of energies and needs of each. The human tide has no use for your dikes; let the free waves be: do they not find their level every day? Do I need, for example, to have a sun for myself, an atmosphere for myself, a river for myself, a forest for myself, all the houses and all the streets in a town for myself? Do I have the right to make myself the exclusive owner, the proprietor, and to deprive others of them, when I do not need them? And if I do not have this right, do I have any more right to wish, as in the system of contracts, to measure for each one – according to his accidental forces of production – what ought to belong to him from all these things? How many rays of sunlight, cubic meters of air or water, or square meters of forest path he can consume? How many houses or parts of houses he shall have the right to occupy; the number of streets or paving stones in the street where he will be allowed to set foot and the number of streets or paving stones where he will be forbidden to walk? – Will I, with or without contract, consume more of things than my nature or temperament requires? Can I individually absorb all the rays of the sun, all the air in the atmosphere, all the water in the river? Can I then take over and burden my person with all the shade of the forest, all the streets of the town, all the paving stones in the street, all the houses in the town and all the rooms of the house? And is it not the same for all that is for human consumption, whether it be a raw material like air or sunshine, or a finished product, like the street or the house? What then is the good of a contract which

can add nothing to my freedom and which may infringe and which would certainly infringe upon it?

And now, as far as production is concerned, is the active principle that is inside me more developed because it has been oppressed, that it has had shackles imposed upon it? It would be absurd to maintain such an assertion. The man called free in current societies, the proletarian, produces far better and much more than the man called negro, the slave. How would it be if he were really and universally free: production would be multiplied a hundredfold. – And the lazy, you will say? The lazy are an expression of our abnormal societies, that is to say that idleness being honoured and labour despised, it is not surprising that men tire of toil that brings them only bitter fruits. But in the state of an anarchic-community with the sciences as they have been developed in our day there could be nothing similar. There would be, as today, beings who are slower to produce than others but as a consequence beings slower to consume, beings quicker than others to produce therefore quicker to consume: the equation is natural. Do you need proof? Take any hundred workers at random and you will see that the greatest consumers amongst them are also the greatest producers. – How can we imagine that the human being, whose organism is composed of so many precious tools and the use of which produces in him a multitude of pleasures, tools of the arms, tools of the heart, tools of the intellect, how can we imagine that he would voluntarily let them be consumed by rust? What! In the state of free nature and of industrial and scientific marvels, in the state of anarchic exuberance in which everything would remind him of activity and every activity of life. What! The human-being can only seek happiness in an imbecilic inactivity? Come on! The contrary is the only possibility.

On this ground of true anarchy, of absolute freedom, there would undoubtedly be as much diversity between beings as there would be people in society, diversity of age, sex, aptitudes: equality is not uniformity. And this diversity in all beings and at all times is precisely what renders all government, constitutional or contractual, impossible. How can we commit ourselves for a year, for a day, for an hour when in an hour, a day, a year we might think differently than when we committed ourselves? – With radical anarchy, there would therefore be women as there would be men of greater or lesser relative worth; there would be children as there would be old people; but all would be indiscriminately none the less human beings and would also be equally and absolutely free to move in the circle of their natural attractions, free to consume and to produce as they see fit, without any paternal, marital or governmental authority, without any legal or contractive regulations to hinder them.

Society thus understood – and you must understand it so, you, anarchist, who boasts of being logical – what do you have to say now about the sexual infirmity of either the female or male human being?

Listen, master Proudhon, do not speak about woman, or, before speaking, study her: go to school. Do not call yourself an anarchist or be an anarchist all the way. Speak to us, if you wish, of the unknown and the known, of God who is evil, of Property which is theft. But when you speak to us about man, do not make him an autocratic divinity, for I will answer you: man is evil! – Do not attribute to him an intellectual capital which only belongs to him by right of conquest, by commerce in love, an usurious wealth which comes to him entirely from woman and which is the product of her own soul, and do not dress in clothes stripped from others,



for then I will answer you: property is theft!

On the contrary, raise your voice against this exploitation of woman by man. Tell the world, with that vigor of argument that has made you an athletic agitator, tell it that man can only pull the revolution out of the mud, drag it from its muddy and bloody rut, with the assistance of woman; that alone he is powerless; that he needs the support of woman's heart and head; that on the path of social progress they must both walk together, side by side and hand in hand; that man can only reach the goal, overcoming the exertions of the journey, only if he has for support and for strength the glances and caresses of women. Tell man and tell woman that their destinies are to bond and to better understand each other; that they have one and the same name, as they are one and the same being, the human being; that they are, by turns and at the same time, one the right arm and the other the left arm, and that, in human identity, their hearts could form only one heart and their thoughts a single bundle of thoughts. Tell them again that on this condition alone will they be able to shine upon each other, pierce in their luminous march the shadows that separate the present from the future, the civilized society from the harmonic society. Finally tell them that the human being – in its relative proportions and manifestations – the human being is like the glow-worm: it shines only by love and for love!

Say it – Be stronger than your weaknesses, more generous than your resentments: proclaim liberty, equality, fraternity, the indivisibility of the human being. Say it: it is public salvation. Declare humanity in danger: summon in mass men and women to throw invading prejudices outside of social boundaries: awaken a Second and Third of September against this masculine high nobility, this aristocracy of sex that would rivet us to the old regime. Say it: you must! Say it with passion, with genius, cast it in bronze, make it thunder... and you will be worthy of others and of yourself.

New Orleans, May 1857

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# South African 'Workerism' in the 1980s: Learning from FOSATU's Radical Unionism

BY LUCIEN VAN DER WALT,  
WITH SIAN BYRNE AND NICOLE ULRICH\*

*This special section features three lightly edited transcripts of presentations at a workshop hosted by the International Labour Research & Information Group and the Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Centre in the Drieziets extension, Orange Farm squatter camp, south of Soweto, South Africa, on 24 June 2017. It was attended by a hall full of community and worker activists, including veterans of the big rebellions of the 1980s.*

Thank you comrades for having me here. The Federation of South African Trade Unions is the focus of my talk. I want to look at what FOSATU stood for and what we can learn from FOSATU. When people remember it, they often label it as marked by "workerism," and they take that as a bad thing. But I want to show the so-called "workerism" of FOSATU was very radical, that this radical South African "workerism" is very important to understand, and build upon, today.

I want to stress, at the start, that what I speak about here rests very heavily, not just on my research, but the work of other comrades, notably Sian Byrne and Nicole Ulrich... Although they are not here in person, they are here as a key influence and inspiration and, in a sense, are my co-presenters in spirit.

Before there was the Congress of South African Trade Unions, today's COSATU, there was FOSATU. FOSATU was set up in 1979. There had been strikes and struggles in the 1970s, starting with a big strike wave in Namibia from 1971-1972, which was then a South African colony, then a big strike wave starting in Durban 1973, which spread around the country. Although we remember 1976 for the bravery of the youth and students, we must remember that the 1976 uprising also involved general strikes by the black working class, mass stayaways.

And as the working class started to flex its muscles, and to organise new, independent unions, the need for unity was felt. In 1979, at Hammanskraal, FOSATU was set up. The flag of FOSATU was red, black and gold, with a hammer, a spanner and a spade. FOSATU grew quickly, despite repression by the apartheid state. Leaders and activists in FOSATU were banned, jailed; some, like Andries Raditsela, were murdered by police. There was continual

\*Lucien van der Walt delivered the talk, but it is based on joint work with Sian Byrne and Nicole Ulrich. See Sian Byrne, Nicole Ulrich and Lucien van der Walt, 2017, "Red, Black and Gold: FOSATU, South African 'Workerism,' 'Syndicalism' and the Nation," in Edward Webster and Karin Pampillas (eds.), *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa: Left Thinking Under Apartheid*. Wits University Press.



FOSATU Workers' Choir

intimidation, and employers would fire workers for going on strike or "agitating" at work. Unemployment is not just about money: unemployment is a weapon of the bosses, and this weapon was used many times against FOSATU.

But, despite the pain, repression and suffering of the comrades in FOSATU, it got bigger and bigger, and stronger and stronger, and by 1985 it was the single biggest black working class organization in the country. And not just the biggest, but in many ways, the strongest. It didn't just exist in a moment of protest, or as a crowd that gathers around a grievance or in a crisis; it existed continuously, as a democratic, bottom-up machine that ran smoothly even when struggles died down. And it had 150,000 members, it had large education programs, it had a newspaper, it had choirs, it had successful strikes and campaigns, it had affiliates across the economy.

## FOSATU'S "Workerism"

"Workerism" was a label that was painted onto FOSATU by those who did not like what FOSATU was doing. The people who gave it the label were not the racist National Party government, were not the police's brutal Security Branch, but the South African Communist Party and the African National Congress. They denounced FOSATU repeatedly.

There was a simple reason: FOSATU refused to bow down to a political party, it did not trust the ANC and it did not like the SACP's top-down politics. FOSATU said that control in FOSATU needed to be in the hands of the workers, and that change in the country had to be radical and benefit the working class, and that parties could not be trusted to do this.

So, the first thing about "workerism" – the main current in FOSATU, and its core politics – was its emphasis on building *autonomous* workers' unions. What that meant was that trade unions needed to be free of outside control. They needed to be controlled by their members – the ordinary workers – and not controlled *inside* the union by a few leaders, and not controlled *outside* the union by political parties, by the bosses or by the government.

We must remember that in those days there were large so-called registered trade unions like the Trade Union Council of South Africa. In fact TUCSA was bigger than FOSATU at one stage. But unions like TUCSA were sweet-heart unions, moderate, entangled into the state, run from above, and weak; they were racially segregated, largely excluding black Africans, and also treating their Coloured and Indian members badly.

FOSATU didn't want to be anything like TUCSA. It wanted autonomy for the working class and poor, who were part of the



working class. FOSATU wanted a union movement embracing *all* workers and under workers' control. In reality, it was mainly black African in composition but it was strong in places where there was a large Coloured working class, for example Port Elizabeth and East London, and where there was a large Indian working class, for example Durban. In its search for the unity of the working class across race, FOSATU also tried to recruit white workers in the factories in Port Elizabeth, East Rand, the Vaal, but with little success.

### Bottom-Up Industrial Unions

The second key part of FOSATU's "workerism" was its stress on systematically building mass-based, bottom-up, profoundly democratic and fighting industrial unions. The idea was to organize industry by industry. So FOSATU would organize one union for the metal industry, one for textiles, one for chemicals and so on.

But rather than rely on laws or leaders, like TUCSA, FOSATU's approach was to organize carefully, patiently. I call it the brick-by-brick approach that creates a mighty fortress. A good example was FOSATU's Metal and Allied Workers Union, which was active in the ISCOR steel factories of the government, in the private sector car factories owned by multinationals, like Ford and Volkswagen, and in the metal and auto industry generally, much of its owned by local white capitalists.

FOSATU's approach, illustrated by MAWU, was quite careful. It would set up a very clear program of action, targeting first a big factory, with, say, 4,000 workers: it's easier to organize a big factory than a small factory. It would capture this base by forming a fighting union that raised demands and won them plus won "recognition agreements" (i.e. negotiating rights) with the bosses. From there, it sent out units to organize other factories nearby, including the smaller ones. Where needed, it would try and combine negotiations across factories, so that the smaller factories and union branches could be helped by the larger ones.

The idea is that you didn't just declare a campaign and make a demand, without an organized base, and without working class power to back it. You wage careful, sometimes slow, social war, factory by factory, workplace by workplace. Each that you win over is another fortress, another center of working class power from which you can expand outwards. You don't make demands that you can't win and you don't drop a demand that you raise. So MAWU might demand, for example, equal wages across races, fight for it, even for two or three years, get a deal, also raise an issue around layoffs, fight, get a deal and so on. These were things that bosses did not want to give, they did not want to concede, but they had to be fought for, and they could be won.

Each struggle and each victory developed confidence, numbers and layers of militants, and made real gains for the working class. If you take the workers out into a battle that you can't win, you lose the larger war; you lose the workers because they are tired and weakened; you break their hearts and wills. And struggle is based fundamentally on the fire and strength of the heart and mind, the will, that power within yourself to keep going. So that is a precious resource and FOSATU understood that you needed to manage it carefully.

By 1982, FOSATU had built MAWU into a mass-based metal union, as well as other strong unions. It was confident that it could confront the employers in key sectors and firms as well as the state where needed, act regionally and nationally and not just at individual workplaces, consolidate the power of the union base, and carry out struggles based on directions from the shop floor.

FOSATU did not, let me stress, reject participation in the

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formal Industrial Council negotiating system of the state. Rather, it insisted that all agreements be directed by and checked by, the base, to prevent the hijacking and misuse of their demands.

### Assemblies and Committees

That brings me to the third key part of FOSATU's "workerist" approach. What FOSATU stressed was that a union was not a head office or a service center, but was based on the shop floor. So they organized based on regular mass meetings, or assemblies, that elected shop stewards, and gave them clear instructions, and made sure they reported back and acted against them if they did not. The idea was you wouldn't have unions based on officials from outside the workplace; as much as possible the workers would be the organizers, and officialdom would be kept in check. This would be carried out within each union, and also across the federation.

So, the leadership at all levels were to be delegates, kept on a tight leash, always accountable to regular meetings. The idea here was to build a union that was based on many, many layers of cadreship, militants – and a leadership generated and regenerated from below. Remember, in the apartheid days, horrors like the 2012 massacre at Marikana, which shocked us, were a regular occurrence; death, torture, mass imprisonment were the daily business of the old regime.

The advantage was that, if one layer got taken out, sent to jail, banned, killed, the union survived. It was not secure because the different parts were separate and independent from each other, like independent cells with sporadic links – but rather, because it was deeply rooted in the workers at the workplaces, with the workers unified through effective, democratic structures and procedures that renewed themselves, in tight unions and a tight federation. The idea was that of a mandated, multi-layer worker-leadership.

Some people now praise assemblies and workers' committees as an *alternative* to unions, but for FOSATU, the union and the federation *centered* on assemblies and workers' committees.

People who were hired by the FOSATU unions or federation for specialist jobs, like media work or full-time organizing, but who were not elected, could not vote in the union structures. Anyone hired was to earn an ordinary worker's wage.

ANC and SACP enemies of FOSATU often claimed that "white intellectuals" were running it. And certainly FOSATU activists included people like Alec Erwin, a former university lecturer. But people like Erwin were a tiny minority in the union leadership; they served either in elected positions, and so were accountable, or in unelected non-voting positions, and so were contained. And most "intellectuals" in the union were black African or Coloured worker-intellectuals, like MAWU's Moses Mayekiso and FOSATU's Joe Foster.

### Education, Identity, History

Fourth, FOSATU's "workerism" placed a heavy emphasis on building working class education, working class identity, working class culture and working class history.

To understand that the working class and its struggles come from and to learn from earlier struggles, and to remember and value them, FOSATU outlined the history of the working class. That the working class in South Africa comes from the older classes of



slaves and servants, sailors and soldiers. That the working class in South Africa is part of the working class of the whole world, with a common interest and struggle. That, in building a working class movement, we must understand where we come from, who are, to understand our struggles and recover our historical memory as a class, our pain and our victories.

In *FOSATU Worker News*, FOSATU outlined South African history from the perspective of the oppressed classes over three hundred years. It took a class line, attacking European colonialism and racism, but linking these to capitalism; and it drew attention to the role of African kings and chiefs in upholding oppression, including through slave-trading. Before FOSATU, there was the SA Congress of Trade Unions; before SACTU there was the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union; outside the unions there were movements like the slave revolts of the old Cape, unemployed movements, the anti-pass protests of the 1950s and 1910s, the squatter movements of the 1940s; and many more.

And FOSATU helped popularize and publicize this history – to celebrate it, but also to learn from past failures, such as how the ICU was destroyed by sloppy organizing, unaccountable leaders and ineffective strategy. FOSATU also worked with the radical History Workshop of academics at the University of the Witwatersrand, participating in their conferences. In 1984, thousands of workers attended the conference, going to and presenting in seminars, learning, talking, making and enriching a history from below.

For FOSATU, we South Africans were part of the world's working class: a South African worker, a Russian worker, a worker in Brazil were of the same class, with the same enemies. You can have Coca-Cola, you have a Sprite, a Pepsi, but they are all fizzy soft drinks. You are exploited in South Korea, you are exploited in Brazil, and you are exploited in Poland: different flavors but the same stuff. FOSATU stressed that the problems that we faced in the 1980s were not only South African problems, they are global, and part of a global struggle. So FOSATU highlighted struggles in Zimbabwe, Poland and Britain, and it located the South African class struggle in a global history of struggle.

FOSATU made interventions in a range of areas. It ran worker choirs, culture days, and promoted images and slogans that stressed its messages. Similarly FOSATU developed materials for the youth, around women's issues, and engaged in a range of political and social areas.

### **Beyond Wages, Beyond Workplaces**

That brings me to the fifth element: contrary to what its enemies said, FOSATU "workerism" was never about ignoring politics or ignoring the world beyond the workplace.

At the workplace, FOSATU did not just raise issues around wages and conditions but other issues too. They recognized that women workers, especially black women workers, faced specific forms of oppression. They raised the need for crèches and childcare at work, and noted how women's jobs and incomes and promotion and role in the unions was affected by the double burden: after the factory, the home. They campaigned for changes and equality. They spent time catching bosses who were sexually harassing women, setting up traps and catching them, and getting them fired or disciplined.

FOSATU positioned itself as the voice of black, Coloured and Indian workers in a racist, capitalist society. It fought the apartheid wage gap, within the same jobs and between different jobs; and racist pension and labor relations and on-site facilities systems; and tackled the authoritarian and racist workplace management system.

It fought to make the workplace more democratic, more non-racial.

So FOSATU's "workerism" wasn't just about money, wasn't just about bus fares, wasn't just about pensions, it was about the working class's struggle for dignity in the workplace, against racism in the factories – and also beyond the workplace. Because FOSATU did not stop at the workplace. It campaigned against oppression in the townships and the larger society, the oppression of the black and Coloured and Indian working class community.

It fought around the specific issues that *some* workers faced that *others* did not, from the perspective of solidarity and unity: besides the oppression of women, they spoke to the youth, to the unemployed, they put a lot of stress on the plight of migrant workers in the towns, and of the workers in the homelands or Bantustans. While unions like FOSATU were able to operate fairly openly in so-called "white" South Africa, homeland leaders like Lucas Mangope and Gatsha Buthelezi did not allow independent unions at all. FOSATU fought this, opposed the homeland system, and tried to break into them and organize unions.

So FOSATU wanted to become involved in township and other struggles, and extend the influence of the unions and organized workers into these spheres. Where possible, FOSATU entered into alliances or common work, especially through its shop-steward councils, which spanned the different FOSATU unions.

These brought together FOSATU workers from different FOSATU affiliates, who lived or worked in the same area. These councils could then engage directly with local community organizations, both as members and leaders in these, and through bring the power of the unions to bear in their support. This could range from forcing employers to put pressure on bus companies, to infusing these structures with democratic practices drawn from the FOSATU tradition, and radical ideas drawn from that tradition.

FOSATU's politics also suggested that workers' control meant that *workers*, as the majority in the township communities, also had to have a large level of influence in those communities.

### **Alliances, Errors, Hesitancy**

FOSATU was criticized, sometimes correctly, for being a bit too cautious in these engagements, and for not giving a greater lead. Sometimes it worked in parallel with other structures, rather than with them; sometimes it stayed away from campaigns; generally it avoided long-term alliances.

Part of this hesitation was because FOSATU was afraid of being swallowed by other groups. It believed, correctly, that many community-based anti-apartheid groups lacked stable democratic structures; that they were often run by the *petty bourgeoisie*, much of which was aligned to the ANC, SACP and other nationalists; and some engaged in political thuggery, including against FOSATU. FOSATU did not trust forces from outside the working class, and did not trust nationalism, which downplayed class differences by stressing common racial and national experiences.

In hindsight, it can be argued that they would have been much stronger and more influential by building long-term links and alliances – tragically, FOSATU stayed out of the United Democratic Front, formed in 1983, and lost the chance to build links with large, like-minded youth and community currents in the UDF. They did work with UDF at times, or support it, but in staying out, they also surrendered it to the nationalists and middle class.

But it is not correct to present FOSATU's "workerist" politics as narrow or bureaucratic. What FOSATU was doing was, in fact, carrying out its agenda, outlined at its 1982 congress in a position paper delivered by Joe Foster. This was that workers needed to be



part of the “popular struggle” but to have their “own, powerful and effective organisation,” “worker leadership” in the neighborhoods, and forge a “working class movement” that went beyond the unions. FOSATU understood that unions were not enough, that the project and power that was developing at workplaces also needed to extend the larger working class, and that unions should be only one part of the FOSATU project.

### Expansive “Workers’ Control”

And this meant the need to strengthen the identity of the working class, to know where we fit into the capitalist system, to understand our power as the working class, and to understand that it is the working class alone who has the power to change society in a way that is fundamentally progressive.

So the notion that the FOSATU “workerist” politics was about being small and contained was completely wrong. There were contradictions and errors and hesitancy in FOSATU’s work, but it was never a moderate, narrow movement.

That brings me to the sixth element: FOSATU “workerism” involved dealing with issues beyond wages in the workplace, and also, it involved building beyond the workplace, but what was the aim?

It pointed to an expansion of worker control over the society and the economy *as a whole*, a new South Africa, in which the working class, the masses, were not just responding to what capital and the state were doing, but exercising real *control*. “Workers’ control,” at one level, meant workers control of the unions; but at another, it was a more radical vision of steady transformation.

This could build on steps like pushing back the frontier of control at work, for example, by having a growing input on decisions, but it would not end its steps there. A new South Africa had to be one in which capitalism and the profit system that exploited and oppressed the working class would be progressively removed.

Some of the workerists, like Mayekiso, argued clearly against the ANC slogan that “The People Must Govern,” asking: who are “the people”? Did they include capitalists? Homeland rulers?

“The people,” here, was rooted in the ANC’s nationalist politics, which downplayed class issues and aimed at a multi-class alliance of all democrats, rather than a class struggle of all working class people. The cost of that alliance, what made it possible, was retaining capitalism. But retaining capitalism meant retaining the exploitation of the majority.

In place of the ANC/ SACP “Freedom Charter,” Mayekiso called for a Workers Charter, which would provide a basis for the workers to “take over and direct the whole” economy.

Elsewhere in Africa, independence brought positive reforms, but soon ended up captured by a nationalist elite that turned on the working class. FOSATU studied the case of neighboring Zimbabwe very closely, noting that nationalists led by Robert Mugabe smashed up strikes and unions, and defended capitalism, soon after taking office.

Why would ANC be different? If there are workers at the bottom, whatever the color of the president, who are suffering then there is no deep change. So Mayekiso insisted that the Freedom Charter was a “capitalist document,” rather than a program for “a change of the whole society.”

So what you can see here is a radical anti-capitalist class struggle politics. But at the same time, FOSATU distanced itself from the SACP, and through its support for workers’ struggles in Poland by the *Solidarność* union movement, also rejected the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its client states, because in these workers had no power.

### Workers Power, National Liberation

This meant that the struggle against apartheid had to be linked to the struggle against apartheid. The ANC and SACP wanted to remove apartheid but follow it with a reformed capitalism, a first “stage” called the “national democratic revolution” or NDR. According to the SACP, this would later (somehow) be followed by a second “stage” of socialism.

FOSATU’s “workerism” did not just disagree with the SACP’s vision of what the second “stage” would be (a USSR-style dictatorship), but rejected splitting the anti-apartheid and the anti-capitalist struggles. Mayekiso insisted that “apartheid is an appendage and a branch of the whole thing – the tree of oppression of capitalism.” So it was not enough to defeat the son, apartheid, you had to defeat the father. Capitalism, Foster said, hid “behind the curtains of apartheid and racism,” but “capital and its lackeys were undoubtedly the major beneficiaries of apartheid.”

FOSATU argued against the NDR two-stage theory, which was being pushed in the UDF and in unions outside FOSATU and by ANC and SACP cells inside FOSATU. In Mayekiso’s words, there should not be “two stages” but “one stage continuous; this thing of two stages is a waste of time and a waste of blood.” So it was crucial that the unions and the working class did not get captured or confused by existing white capital or emerging black capital.

### Working Class Nation

FOSATU wanted one nation – but centered on the working class. It believed in a united South Africa: remember in those days, there was the Bantustan policy, the apartheid segregation in everything from jobs to toilets to schools, around 14 different parliaments for different races and homelands, different TV stations, different everything.

For FOSATU, these divisions had to be removed, as unjust, and as part of the working class struggle: the working class has many races, languages and cultures, but it had to be united around a common identity and aim.

A new South African nation needed to overcome the old divisions, including race, but be forged in struggle and based on justice and equality. Race was not the basis of inclusion or exclusion, but racial equality through radical changes in the cities, in the economy, in the society was essential. Here, majority rule meant working class power, and, of course, the majority of the class was black African, Coloured and Indian.

So the new nation would be non-racial, but it would be one in which the working class predominated. It would be driving the car, not fixing the car. It would be one in which the working class put its imprint on the nation. The culture of the nation would be that of the working class. The governance and power of the nation would be vested as much as possible in the working class.

It is sometimes argued that the choice is *between* national liberation (from apartheid) and workers’ liberation (from capitalism), but FOSATU never set up such an empty choice: rather, real national liberation *for the working class* required workers power and anti-capitalism.

### In Closing: Strengths & Weaknesses

I want to make three general points in closing. One, in many ways FOSATU was right. If we look at South Africa today, the





poverty, powerlessness, injustice, if we look at how people like Cyril Ramaphosa – in his time, a hero of the working class, a union man, today a capitalist and a traitor – if we look at the ANC today, we have exactly the anti-worker outcome that FOSATU warned against.

FOSATU was right: when you get tied into the political parties, they take your best and brightest and corrupt them, they seek to capture the unions and smother them. FOSATU was right: the working class needs its own independent program, it needs to be anti-capitalist, its power needs to rest in working class mass organizations, not just in unions but communities and it cannot rest until capitalism is defeated by workers control.

But, in other ways, FOSATU was also wrong. FOSATU had a good criticism, a good daily practice and a vision of a good future. But at the level of a strategy linking what it did, in organizing, educating and mobilizing, and what it wanted in the end – that new South Africa it sought – there was no clear link. You can pack your bags for a trip to Cape Town, but unless you have got a plan to get there you are probably not going to get there.

In terms of a strategy linking the vision, linking workers' control today to a working class centered-new nation, linking present-day winnable demands to a massive shift in power and wealth, linking criticism of the nationalists to defeating the nationalists – FOSATU fell down.

Some parts of FOSATU were spending their time on court cases as part of a strategy to reshape the state; some parts were aiming at taking power: these are not the same thing. Some parts were working with the ANC quietly, some parts were saying to hell with the ANC. Some parts thought of the new South Africa as socialist, others as social democratic. All were vague on details. "Workerism" was not anarcho-syndicalism but a mixture of different ideas.

The "workerist" thinking in FOSATU wasn't developed enough. This was partly because of daily pressures and a stress on getting things done. But it was also because the "workerists" hadn't organized themselves into a specific group that could develop theory and strategy. They were a network, based in the unions, rather than a coherent group.

This also meant that, when the ANC and SACP began to build cells and secret cabals in the FOSATU unions, the workerists were not able to respond effectively. They needed to organize as a group in the unions, and outside the unions, including in the UDF, to

plan and evaluate and strategize and intervene. Not just to clarify the problems in strategy, but to deal with other threats too.

People like Jacob Zuma, then the head of ANC secret intelligence, were directing ANC/SACP plans to capture the unions: they were skilled and they did not care about democracy. And they ended up winning.

When FOSATU joined with other unions in 1985 to form COSATU, it was the biggest and best-organized bloc, and the first COSATU resolutions had a deep "workerist" imprint, including independence from parties. Within two years, they were gone as a serious force. Even MAWU, which became the heart of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa in 1987, ended up adopting the Freedom Charter and NDR, even if they gave this a radical interpretation. Jay Naidoo, a great activist but an ANC cadre, was one who worked inside FOSATU, and he helped forge the defeat of "workerism" in COSATU.

### Tomorrow, Today

Third, in closing, let us remember something key from FOSATU: the idea that tomorrow is built today, that, as MAWU said, learn from the past, act in the present, to build the future. What we do now shapes what we get tomorrow – you cannot take a tree that is growing, cut it down, take off the bark, take off the leaves and use as a kerie, or club, and then put it back in the ground and think that it is going to be a tree. You cannot build an undemocratic organization and think it will become democratic. You cannot raise your dog to bite people and then be surprised when it bites people.

If we want a democratic, worker-controlled society, FOSATU understood, you need democratic unions and a democratic working class movement. If you want a society beyond capitalism you need clear ideas of how to get there and you need to practice what you preach. The ANC in exile was a top-down structure, it was run from the top by men like Zuma and Thabo Mbeki, top-down. When the ANC was unbanned, the exiled ANC took over and systematically undermined the best of the democratic traditions of the UDF, which it soon disbanded, and of COSATU, which it has systematically penetrated. It did not have democratic traditions or tolerate opponents then, and there should be no surprise that it is undemocratic and intolerant now.

## Lessons from the 1984-85 Vaal Uprising for Rebuilding a United Front of Communities and Workers Today

BY JONATHAN PAYN

Comrades, the talk I am giving is based on a paper that I have written. The paper is a work in progress. I am hoping that, through the discussions we will have, you will give me some direction. I can see some of the dots that can be connected, but I am missing some. The written paper is called "Asinamali! Rebuilding a united front of communities and workers: #GraveFeesMustFall, neoliberalism and the 1984-1985 Vaal Uprising." It's a big title but we'll unpack it.

*When we talk about people's power we are not thinking about putting our leaders into the very same structures. We do not want Nelson Mandela to be the state President in the same kind of parliament as Botha. We do not want Walter Sisulu to be Chairperson of a Capitalist Anglo-American corporation.*

So said a United Democratic Front pamphlet called "Building People's Power" that was produced in the 1980s. It continued, "We

are struggling for a different system where power is no longer in the hands of the rich and powerful. We are struggling for a government that we will all vote for." The UDF, formed in 1983, was a coalition of anti-apartheid community, church, worker, youth, sports and other groups. Along with forces like the "workerist" Federation of South African Trade Unions it played a key role in resistance.

What the UDF wanted sounds like almost the exact opposite of what actually happened: more than 20 years later, it is not Sisulu who is chairperson of Anglo-American Corporation, but the ANC's Cyril Ramaphosa, the Butcher of Marikana, who is a shareholder on the capitalist Lonmin Corporation. Even though people have the right to vote now, fewer and fewer people are actually voting because they don't get what they vote for; and power and wealth are still in the hands of the rich and powerful.



**Special Section: People's Power, Workers' Control & Grassroots Politics in South Africa: Rethinking Practices of Self-Organization & Anti-Apartheid Resistance in the 1980s**

What went wrong, and what lessons we can draw? What are some of the similarities between the 1980s and today? What is the way forward?

**The Vaal Uprising, 1984**

Conditions in the townships for the black working class in the 1980s were very similar to the conditions today. Starting in the late 1970s and into the '80s, the economy was in a recession. If we look at the Vaal, there had been a slump in the steel industry, so there had been mass retrenchments at ISCOR, the old state steel company, which had a large plant in the Vaal. This has since been privatized and is now Arcelor-Mittal. The conditions in the townships, which were already bad, because of the racist policies of separate development between the black townships and white suburbs, were getting worse and worse. There was a deepening education crisis that had been exposed in 1976, and black youth were not happy with the quality of education that they were receiving, with racism in the schools and so on. There was a severe housing crisis as well. The government was not building nearly enough of the houses that were required in the urban townships.

And, to top it off, starting in the late 1970s, the local government dealing with black African townships – the Black Local Authorities and the Bantu Administration Board – started increasing rents and charges for services like electricity and water included in the rent. In July 1984, the Lekota town council announced that there would be a rent increase in the Vaal. The Vaal Civic Association, which was affiliated to the UDF, started organizing an anti-rent campaign throughout August, and, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1984, the different representatives from different committees that were part of the VCA met at the Roman Catholic Church to plan for a stay-away, or community-based general strike, the next day, Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

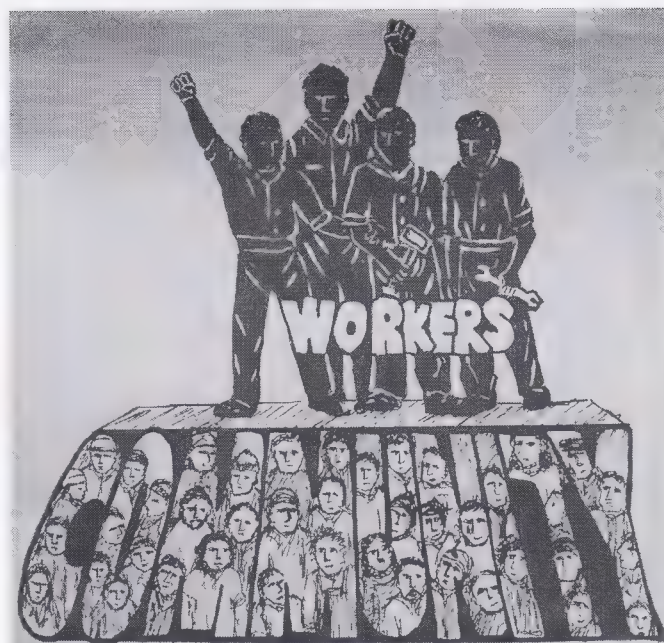
That fateful day workers responded to the VCA call for a stay-away. Students responded, there were protest marches and so on and, as some of you comrades will recall, the police opened fire on marchers, and the situation exploded. People started to fight back and what started here, in the Vaal, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September, had within a matter of months spread across the country, beginning the 1984-85 township uprising.

People organized themselves, as they had already been organizing for some time, and they made the townships ungovernable: the BLAs began to crumble, they didn't have any authority in the townships, and neither did the larger apartheid state. Some areas were made no-go zones for the state, and people started to take control of the townships and to take back control of their lives.

**#GraveFeesMustFall**

That was part of the beginning of the end for the apartheid system. What started on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September contributed directly to the collapse of apartheid. But more than 30 years after the Vaal Uprising began, here in the very same region in the Vaal, people have found it essential to start organizing against *another* rates increase, this time imposed by the *post-apartheid* government: grave fee increases.

Starting last year, people have organized against increases in the



cost of municipal plots to bury their relatives. I am sure comrades have heard – it has been talked about on community radio, and you have heard about the #GraveFeesMustFall campaign, or been involved – the cost of a plot went from between R400 to R600, to over R1,000. And that is only if you get buried in your municipality of residence. If you get buried outside your municipality, it is even more expensive. Because municipal cemeteries are getting full, sometimes you either have to resort to “reopening,” where they bury someone on top of an old grave, or you have to get buried at another municipality. But if you get buried elsewhere, costs are huge. So, say for example, that you lived here in Orange Farm, in the City of Johannesburg municipality, but the local cemeteries are full, then you have to go to another municipality to be buried, and your family gets charged up to R4,000.

When we ask why the grave fees have become so expensive, there are two main reasons. First, it seems that the ruling party, the African National Congress, and the state, are selling land to private individuals to profit by opening private cemeteries. Second, local government is using every opportunity to squeeze more money out of working class and poor residents.

If the cemeteries are getting full, then surely the government needs to make more land available for graves instead of privatizing them. What we need are cheap affordable grave sites, and yet these are getting privatized or commercialized to make a profit. This shows where the government's priorities lie.

**Urban Neo-Liberalism**

The problem is linked to the capitalist system of neo-liberalism, which is affecting us, in every part of our lives. Privatizing, commercializing and raising service charges, which is what the #GraveFeesMustFall campaign is fighting, brings us up against the problem of neo-liberalism, and how this links to the legacy of apartheid.

It is important to understand what neo-liberalism involves. It is about privatization, commercialization, outsourcing, rising service charges, more cut-offs, flexible jobs – and removing all barriers to profit-making at the expense of the working class and poor.

Starting in the 1970s, the economy internationally, and also in South Africa went into crisis. The bosses were not making enough money, they were losing profitability, and one of the ways that the government tried to get profitability back for the capitalists and



bosses from the 1970s, was to use neo-liberalism.

Neo-liberalism is enforced by states, allied with big companies. It is embraced by the ANC today, but did not start with it. It started with the racist National Party government, which moved in the 1970s in the neo-liberal direction. It cut its social spending on things like education, healthcare, service delivery and so on, and started making local governments raise more of their own money within the municipal area. So instead of the national treasury giving enough money to municipalities, local government needed to find ways to raise money itself to be able to function. This meant charging more and spending less, and ensuring cost-recovery, meaning recovering money spent on things.

### **The NP and the Townships**

Obviously this approach hits the black working class hardest, whether under the ANC or the NP. So, in the 1970s, when the apartheid state introduced the BLAs, and allowed black Africans to vote for local councilors in the BLAs, it also made the BLAs have to raise their own money for development in those townships, from those same voters.

One of the main ways that municipalities raise money is by charging businesses, corporations and property owners taxes, based on the value of their property. Another key way is to charge them for electricity, water and so on. So, when the apartheid state introduced the BLAs, they insisted the BLAs raise most of their own money.

As you can still see in the townships, there weren't a lot of businesses, there were no big corporations or workplaces, and property was not worth a lot. The townships exist, mainly, as reservoirs of cheap labor, neglected by the state. So the BLAs could not get a lot of money through taxing properties in the townships, unlike, for example, in rich areas like Sandton, where there are a lot of big corporations, as well as the hub of the economy, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The apartheid white municipality for Sandton could cope with falling money from central government quite easily, by raising property taxes and service charges, on the companies and the JSE and on wealthy residents. This caused some complaints, but no crisis.

But the BLAs, based in poor and underdeveloped areas, with a mainly working class and poor population, did not have these options. So they raised rents. This caused massive unrest, and sparked the Vaal Uprising, which sparked the township insurrections of the mid-1980s.

The end of the NP and the apartheid regime, brought some important changes, including the end of the BLAs and the merger of black African, Coloured, Indian and white local government into unified municipalities. The formal segregation was ended.

### **The ANC and Townships**

But the new ANC government did not end neo-liberalism. Instead, its reforms are all framed by neo-liberalism. So, the ANC soon started doing the same thing as the NP when dealing with the townships. Local government had to raise a large part of its own money; the amount of money from the national treasury that goes to local government has actually been cut drastically in the last 20 years.

The result is that local governments, like the City of Johannesburg, raise money and cut costs by privatizing or commercializing services like electricity and water, by casualizing and retrenching workers, by raising charges and cutting people off if they do not pay. Raising grave fees in the Vaal is just another way for the municipalities to try raise more revenue, and another way to try

create space for business to make profits.

But there is not enough money raised, even with these methods, so the townships remain poor and underdeveloped. This continues the legacy of apartheid's separate development, with its divide between the suburbs and the townships, which can be seen in everything from streetlights to roads to housing.

This is one of the main injustices that people were fighting *against* in the townships in the 1970s and 1980s. The old apartheid urban policies don't exist on paper anymore, but current neo-liberal policies have the same effect.

Because what happens is that the City of Johannesburg, for example, generates a lot of revenue in Sandton, in Rosebank, in the wealthier old white suburbs, and that money gets invested back into the same areas to develop them, to maintain them, to keep them clean and things like that. But Orange Farm, for example, which is also part of the City of Johannesburg municipality, is a township and a squatter camp, and the municipality can't raise a lot of money here and so, it does not spend a lot of money here.

So the legacy of separate development continues. The money raised by the municipality in the historically (and still mainly) white suburbs stays there, while not enough money is raised in the historically (and still mainly working class and poor) townships to develop these areas, and reverse the legacy of separate development.

### **The Past in the Present**

Other objective conditions are very similar today, to what they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Starting in 2008, the global economy started going into crisis again. The thing about capitalism is that it is full of crises, and the system doesn't really work smoothly, it is not stable. Every couple of years it goes into crisis, whereby the bosses are not making enough money and the governments lose out on tax, and so they need to find ways to increase profitability.

What they do is that they cut wages, they retrench people and they try to make the working class and the poor pay for the crisis, by shifting the cost of the crisis onto the backs of the working class. They are trying to make the workers and the poor, in South Africa the black African and Coloured working class especially, pay for the capitalist crisis in order to increase the incomes of the bosses and politicians and the ruling class.

Since the 1970s this has involved neo-liberalism. From the 1970s, urban neo-liberalism by the BLAs worked by increasing the rent. From the 1990s, urban neo-liberalism works by increasing specific charges, how much you pay for electricity and water – and now, for graves.

Other conditions are also very similar between then and now. We know that there is still a big crisis in the education system, as we have seen with the Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall campaigns: black students are not happy with the content and quality of education, and with the fact that it is not affordable. Government funding cuts to universities have led to massive increases in fees, which exclude black working class students, as well as to outsourcing, which attacks the workers.

We still have a massive housing crisis in this country, despite government building low-cost "RDP" housing. At the beginning of May 2017, there were big protests in black African and Coloured townships in the south of Johannesburg like Freedom Park, Ennerdale and in the Vaal, around housing, because the government is simply not building enough houses to end the apartheid backlog or deal with the ongoing growth of the towns.

On top of that, there are massive evictions going on in places like the Vaal. What made rent so key to the BLAs was the fact that a



very large section of township houses were actually state-owned. As far as possible, the apartheid state wanted to prevent blacks having urban property, rather keeping them on leases. So the BLAs could squeeze people for rent, and evict non-payers.

Many of these municipal houses have since been quietly privatized, and many have ended up in the hands of banks, with many people are now paying off bonds to banks. With all the other costs going up, with the rising unemployment and low and stagnating wages, all associated with the cheap black labor system inherited from apartheid, and deepened by neo-liberalism, many can't afford to pay their bonds anymore. With people defaulting on their bonds, they are facing evictions.

So, the problem of the townships is not solved, but continues.

### **The Subjective Factor**

The objective conditions of the 1970s and 1980s, just before the Vaal Uprising, and those of today are very similar, but we are not seeing a massive rebellion today. Rent increases in 1984 were the last straw, they pushed people over the edge – to say, “We can't take it anymore! We can't afford to pay more for rent, we are starving and we can't afford it” – and to a social explosion.

But today, despite massive suffering, and sporadic and widespread protests, developments like #GraveFeesMustFall, conditions have not pushed people over the edge, or led to big campaigns, higher and sustained levels of struggle, or a unification of the different protests countrywide.

Why not? The reason lies in what we call the “subjective conditions”: the level of organization and consciousness of the black working class in the townships (and in the workplaces) are not as developed now, as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. So although the urban working class and even the unions, are bigger than ever before, they are not as powerful and active as before.

One reason is that for at least 30 years the black working class has been under attack, firstly by neo-liberalism, which has tried to make the working class pay for the economic crisis, and which has gutted movements and unions and deepened divisions, and secondly, by nationalism.

The working class has been ideologically and organizationally attacked by nationalism.

What do I mean by “nationalism”? Nationalism is the idea that all people in a nation – regardless of class – need to unite to win state power, through a formation, a nationalist party. This thinking is at the heart of the ANC, as well as the rival nationalist parties.

Nationalism defines the political task as building a party that can capture the state. The state can then, supposedly, liberate the oppressed nation. Meanwhile, divisions in the nation, such as between rich and poor, need to be hushed up.

For the ANC in the 1970s and 1980s, this meant that all movements, including the UDF and FOSATU, were seen simply as ways to build the ANC, which would carry out a so-called stage of National Democratic Revolution. The NDR would be capitalism under black majority rule. Later (some hoped) this would be followed by a second “stage,” a transition to socialism. The core social base of ANC nationalism lay in the black middle class and educated black intelligentsia.

### **“People's Power” and the UDF**

But the nationalist project involved undermining what people on the ground were actually doing. From the 1970s, people started organizing themselves on a massive scale. They knew, as the UDF stated, that “the Apartheid state doesn't represent us and have our

interests at heart,” and they rejected the BLAs and other cosmetic reforms; they organized to have more control over their lives.

They did it in workplaces where they started organizing democratic trade unions, based on the factory floor, democratic worker-controlled unions workers built in struggles, which led to FOSATU. This was a way for workers to try and get more control over their lives, including in the workplace, and a means to fight exploitation and oppression. The aim was seen as “workers' control.”

FOSATU became the hub of this approach.

And in the townships, people did the same thing, through structures like street committees, civics, clinics, crèches, student groups, women's groups. Like the new unions, these engaged with a range of issues, and were usually built by focusing on immediate issues that affected working class and poor people. So these were involved in fighting evictions and putting people back in their houses, in campaigning against rent increases and the cost of buses, and things like that. This is what the VCA was all about. By focusing on these immediate issues, and by winning small victories, and by linking the immediate problems people faced to the bigger situation in the country, of racist rule and capitalist exploitation, they were able to build strong democratic organizations and conscientize people.

So, when the Vaal Uprising happened, there was already a relatively high level of organization amongst the working class, with people organizing to try and reclaim power and some control over their lives. The UDF became the hub of this approach.

When the Vaal Uprising happened, people took this self-organization to another level: the BLAs collapsed in many areas, and many townships were made into no-go areas for the apartheid state. People started to move from this situation of “ungovernability,” to what was called “people's power,” where ordinary people started to administer the neighborhoods through “organs of people's power.”

This could involve street committees, or removing sewerage, or taking control of sanitation, or trying to restructure education, or building “people's parks,” or “people's education,” or anti-crime patrols, which were taking over the function of the police from the state and making sure that people were not engaging in anti-social behavior, drastically reducing rape and murder and violence. In some cases, this involved “people's courts,” to deal with people that infringed on other people's rights, and committed anti-social acts.

As the UDF noted, the risings starting in 1984 was met with massive repression from 1984, including successive States of Emergency, and this meant you couldn't have the big mass rallies, community meetings and things like that. This pushed people to organize on a more local level, and this often meant that the organizations became more democratic, because people were organizing street by street by street, organizing street committees and block committees and so on, because they couldn't have mass community meetings anymore.

So the practice of “people's power” was shaped by the increased repression, and, as the UDF said, the proliferation and growing role of organs of people's power could be seen as a “positive growth out of a defensive measure.” The UDF noted, for example, “the development of people's clinics in several townships”: “in setting up people's clinics, and in training comrades in basic first aid skills we are also beginning to plant the seeds of a new society.”

They went on, “We must be clear that we do not aspire at this stage to erect a completely alternative health structure. The medical facilities, the big hospitals, and the clinics that do exist in our country should belong to all.” So, do not just build people's



clinics on the margins, but also build the power to take control of the major clinics and hospitals and so on that already existed.

This raised a complex strategic issue:

Should our people's organizations take responsibility for running crèches in our townships? Or should we put pressure on the government to supply crèches? When local administration collapses, should our organizations take responsibility for refuse removal? Or should we demand that the state resumes the service? When people's organizations run soup kitchens ... are they forgetting the struggle and becoming charity organizations?

The UDF answered: "the removal of rubbish, or the supply of soup kitchens or crèches is neither reformist or progressive in itself. It depends on the concrete situation and the way in which these actions are combined with other activities. The supplying of crèches or of soup must never become an end in itself."

### Subordinating "People's Power"

So, people began to build organized power outside and against the apartheid state. The idea of workers' control was central to FOSATU, and people's power, to the mass base of the UDF, and in both cases, there were moves to expand these to take more power, as "the seeds of a new society." In fact, the central UDF structures, which were dominated by the black middle class, were left behind. It was the ordinary people who started doing this first, and the UDF's national secretary, Popo Molefe, admitted that the UDF was caught "trailing behind the masses."

The UDF leadership then started to theorize "people's power." But the leadership was responding after the fact, since the practice was already developing. Because the UDF leadership was often aligned to the ANC, it theorized "people's power" in a way that fitted it into the ANC's nationalist project. So, while they were trying to understand what was happening on the ground, they also sought to bring the UDF base back under the control of the UDF leadership, and also tried to link "people's power" to the ANC's NDR project.

For example, the UDF leadership insisted: "we do not want to tie organizations down in the endless supply of services if it means they forget the main task of the political struggle." But then they defined the "main task of the political struggle" as the capture of state power, by the ANC. This wasn't necessarily the "main task" as defined by the people on the ground, when they set up "people's power" in the first place. And the UDF leadership completely ignored the basic contradiction between a project of building "workers' control" and "people's power" from below, with the daily participation of the masses, and of mass movements and local structures; and the project of state power, which is power from above, in the hands of a few, and of parties, which excludes the masses.

### The "NUMSA Moment"

By the end of the 1980s, the ANC had come to play a central role in the struggle, and this included it taking over the struggle from unions and community movements. And with this, the projects of workers' control and "people's power" were deeply undermined. When the ANC was unbanned in 1990, it quickly closed down the UDF, and strengthened its grip on the unions. After it was installed in government in 1994, it then carried on with the neo-liberal project and did its best to prevent protests.

Since then, there have been many efforts to rebuild a mass working class protest movement – one that could tackle the ANC government – but mostly without success. The most recent is the



United Front, started by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, which broke its ties with the ANC in 2013. So far, all of these efforts have foundered. Why? And what can we learn from the 1980s about what is needed, to rebuild a mass movement?

One of the problems has been tendency to forget what the 1970s and 1980s showed: you do not start a movement with grand declarations, but with people's daily struggles, like around wages or rents or corrupt municipal officials, and then you move from there to the bigger issues. It is clear from the 1980s that a lot of ordinary working class people didn't get involved in movements that seemed to operate outside their experiences, where they didn't feel comfortable with the language and the tone, or felt that the movement was being led and dictated from outside.

NUMSA sees its United Front as a revival of the UDF process, with the United Front meant to link workplace and township struggles. But NUMSA has not yet done enough of the hard, patient work needed to build its credibility through participation in daily township struggles, reintegrating into these struggles.

Instead it has put its energies into calling for a new workers' party, while presenting itself as the vanguard of the whole working class. But what FOSATU and the UDF base showed was that you need to start small, in daily life, to build the basis for a countrywide movement.

NUMSA is skipping these vital steps, like other post-apartheid initiatives, and does not see, for example, the importance of issues like #GraveFeesMustFall; and it has also retained much of the old ANC framework of the NDR, with its focus on capturing the state. Unfortunately NUMSA has not gone back to its roots in the "workerist" FOSATU, which had kept the ANC at arm's length, and which rejected the NDR idea on the grounds that the struggle against apartheid had to be combined with the struggle against capitalism – and the grounds that nationalist movements betrayed the working class.

Whereas the ANC/ Congress tradition said that the main political task was the transfer of state power from the whites to the majority, FOSATU went further to say you could only tackle racism if you tackled capitalism as well. This meant that the struggle against apartheid must at the same time be a struggle against capitalism, and that you needed strong, independent working class organizations – including worker-controlled unions – to do this.

In these ways, NUMSA has not really addressed the problem of the subjective conditions. Instead, it has actually been "trailing behind the masses," as many people in communities realized that the ANC was capitalist and neo-liberal 20 years ago: NUMSA, which thinks that it is the vanguard of the working class, has taken a long time to arrive at the same conclusion.

### The Big Lesson

The focus on state power, championed by the ANC and its allies in the UDF leadership – and in sections of the unions, including the NUMSA leadership today – has led us to where we are now. But the state is an instrument of minority rule. Whether



it is headed by a P.W. Botha in 1984, or Nelson Mandela in 1994, the state is part of the capitalist system. It must, in the current period, implement neo-liberalism; it must, in all periods, promote the interests of the rich and powerful over the interests of the working class and poor. It ensures that the capitalist class can continue exploiting and oppressing the workers. Its top-down approach is completely at odds with real workers' control or "people's power."

To get out of this mess, we have to build a powerful working class movement. If we are going to be able to build such a movement, then we need to go back to basics, back to what people were doing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and rebuild democratic, independent unions and working class organizations in the town-

ships, rebuild workers' control and people's power by grappling with daily struggles.

That means engaging in and building movements that are able to actually win gains, that improve the conditions in the workplaces and the townships, and that can accumulate capacity to the point that they can start – as in the 1980s – to replace the existing system with control from below. A movement that fights to liberate the black working class – not with the intention of giving that power on a platter to someone else, but to use organs of workers' control and people's power to take back control of our lives and society, and to put the economy and the administration of the country under the control of the working class.

# Practices of Self-Organization in South Africa:

## The Experience of the 1980s and its Implications for Contemporary Protest

BY DARIA ZELENKOVA

The talk that I'm going to present today is based on a research project that I carried out with my colleague Vladislav Kruchinsky in South Africa in 2011-2013. The aim of our research was to analyze and explore the methods and practices of self-organization from below that existed in the crucial 1980s period of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The vast majority of the material that's written about that period of struggle is devoted to the role of the large, institutionalized anti-apartheid forces, such as the United Democratic Front, an umbrella body for the community-based anti-apartheid organizations including church and sports groups, which was formed in 1983. A large part of it also focuses on the African National Congress, which is presented in the dominant narrative of the ANC as the leader of the anti-apartheid struggle.

My aim, with Vlad, was to look beyond these big organizations, and to focus on communities' struggles, viewed through ordinary people's stories. When we started our research, we understood that we wanted first-hand information, from the participants in the struggles. This is social history, meaning that it looks at the view from below, with the people interviewed themselves active participants in the stories they tell. We conducted extensive interviews with active members of the communities, township residents, from those days. We hope to finish this project with a book, which will be a compilation of the interviews.

### History From Below

The interviews that we collected shed light on very important local histories of the politicization of, and resistance by, working class and poor people, against economic inequality and the op-

### Special Section: *People's Power, Workers' Control & Grassroots Politics in South Africa: Rethinking Practices of Self-Organization & Anti-Apartheid Resistance in the 1980s*

pression of the racist apartheid regime. We learned how ordinary township residents, not necessarily activists, but ordinary aunties and school pupils, mothers and grandmothers, and trade unionists, *reclaimed power* at the level of their yards, their blocks, their street, their zones, and eventually, of the whole township. We learned how new spaces based on a relatively horizontal distribution of power emerged, and what challenges this "horizontality" faced.

In addition to the interviews, we did work at two major archives of South Africa, which have collected material from the 1980s struggles. These are the Wits Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the South African History Archive next to the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg. We analyzed original leaflets, brochures, minutes of meetings, posters and newspapers from the 1980s.

I am going to present some of this material today. The main question in our research was: Why social self-organization by the working class and the poor in South Africa, based on the principles of equal distribution of power, and often with a very horizontal or flat structure, became an *idea* that could inspire masses around the country, and worked as a *practice* that helped dismantle apartheid?

I'd like to start with why we focused on the 1980s. We do so for two reasons.

First of all the 1980s was a crucial period in the anti-apartheid struggle, with mass resistance coupled to unprecedented levels of social and political self-organization. That was the time when the "notions of 'popular democracy,' 'people's power,' 'self-empowerment,' 'democracy from below' were all introduced as new ideas and practices into South African politics" (in the words of UDF veteran Raymond Suttner, in an interview).

A careful analysis of the 1980s in South Africa shows that the dismantling of the apartheid regime became possible because the process of resistance was dispersed through the whole country, through countless acts of local disobedience, of consumer/transport/school boycotts, of strikes and stay-aways – or community-based general strikes. This dispersed resistance built on, and gave rise to, alternative practices of self-governance by ordinary people.

Secondly, a very important feature of that period was a democratization of movements, and the birth of a radical democratic culture. This included changes at the personal level. It was in the 1980s that, for the first time, issues like gender inequality, of freedom of choice of a partner, and of domestic violence were openly



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GRASSROOTS, WITS HISTORICAL PAPERS ARCHIVE

raised on a wide scale, and when it became possible to openly oppose “traditional leaders” like chiefs and kings, something noted by analysts like Michael Neocosmos.

A major political event in that decade was the creation of the UDF as an umbrella structure capable of uniting a huge number of the already-existing organizations throughout the country, and of spurring more organizing. The UDF was contested, but over time, it came to identify itself strongly with a radical vision of change.

### A “People’s Democracy”

Leading UDF figure Morphe Morobe commented in a talk called “Towards a People’s Democracy” that a “democratic South Africa is one of the *aims* or goals of our struggle.” But he also made it clear that democracy is the *means* by which we conduct the struggle:

The creation of democratic means is for us as important as having democratic goals as our objective. Too often models of a future democratic South Africa are put forward which bear no relation to existing organizations, practices and traditions of political struggle in this country. What is possible in the future depends on what we are able to create and sustain now. A democratic South Africa will not be fashioned only after transference of political power to the majority has taken place.

The UDF outlined a much more radical vision of democracy than what South Africa ended up with in 1994. Morobe continued “Our democratic aim... is control over every aspect of our lives, and not just the right (important as it is) to vote for a central government every four to five years.” He stressed that “The creation of a democratic South Africa” was not something to be left for the future, or delivered from above; it “can only become a reality with the participation of millions of South Africans in the process – a process which has already begun in the townships, factories and schools of our land,” through the yard and street committees, civics, student groups, unions and other formations that had emerged.

As the 1980s progressed, this vision became a practice, both in daily struggles, and when, as we will see, some organizations involved in resistance started to replace the state with what were called “organs of people’s power.” In some cases, for example, street committees helped run public services, youth organizations created parks, and people created self-defense and anti-crime patrols.

### Unions and Townships

It is necessary to identify the two most important prerequisites for the emergence of the UDF. First, from the middle of the 1970s, after the famous 1973 Durban strikes, the independent trade union

movement was gaining serious strength: mass strikes and factory struggles took place in the country, workers established democratic control of their unions and created strike committees. The spread of the democratic culture and organizing approach of these unions, especially the Federation of South African Trade Unions formed in 1979, played a major role in mobilizing ordinary people, and in enabling the development of so-called “organs of people’s power” outside the workplace.

Secondly, in the townships where, since the late 1970s, there were conditions of socio-economic decline in the context of capitalist crisis, there was the emergence of new organizations in the forms of street committees and action committees and “civic” associations.

While the unions raised issues around wages, transport, racist treatment and so on at work, the new community structures’ task was to fight for the everyday social needs of the residents: decent housing, lower rents, electricity, against evictions, etc. As with the unions, these struggles raised larger issues around the distribution of wealth and power; and, as with the unions, these structures enabled people to take more and more control over their daily lives, and to start to build a counter-power against the government – resisting the state, and sometimes later replacing some of its functions.

The socio-economic situation of township residents was very difficult. In conditions of growing unemployment, rising prices, and low-quality education and municipal services, and the under-development of the townships, issues like employment, housing and services were quite sharp. It must be remembered that, in many townships, there was little access to electricity, or to water in the home, sewerage systems often involved public toilets or the bucket system, and there were massive housing backlogs.

In this situation, women and children often played a key role in struggles. Even non-politicized housewives were easily mobilized into the struggle for local change. One example comes from the Valhalla Park Civic Association, which was formed by the residents of the Coloured township of Valhalla Park in the Western Cape to address evictions. Auntie Jane Roberts, who took part in this from 1984, told us that “we started to see what was happening to the people in the communities, and we decided as a community, ‘Okay, we gonna to be built up now.’” The Civic reconnected water and electricity that was cut off by the authorities, and put people back into the houses if they were evicted.

Another activist, Auntie Gertie, helped build the Valhalla Concerned Residents Association, after she was evicted, with her three little children. After she had some success in fighting evictions, she started to help others in her area. She told us her story of involvement in the struggle:

I grew up in poverty and I used to live here, and there, and all around. As my father was working, he wasn’t able to look after me as a child; I had to go to school and I lived by one auntie, and then by another auntie, and so, I travelled around as a child. And at the age of, I think, 10-11 my father got married to another woman and ... then I went to live with the stepmother and she was [not] kind to me. I grew up, there was nobody I could have gone to and say, ‘My [eye] is sore,’ so I grew up very independently.... So I became very independent, do everything on my own. And in the 1980s, I became a single mother: I gave birth to my son and not married; and then a daughter, and then another daughter; and then I had three children. And I became a single mother then. And yes, there was nobody to go to: I just had to find my own way, with the little money I earn, I had to find my own way. Through that I’ve become into struggle.... I have



been evicted by the City of Cape Town. Not twice but thrice. That is how I became involved in the civic organization.

She continued:

There were three of us... We called people to the public meeting, and we spoke with the people and said we're forming this organization named Concerned Residents, we are ... going to assist you – and who of you people is prepared to join us?

Another respondent, Trevor Ngwane, who was active in the Jabavu branch of the Soweto Civic Association in the 1980s, remembered how this civic operated:

we met in people's houses, we had one meeting a week... We would rotate, this time in this house, and this time in this...

For example we would hold a meeting in a priest's place, because he's respected, or in a teacher's place, or in trade unionist's house. And then there was no membership, and the issues we discussed were problems in the townships, the lights, we talked about the end of apartheid, we talked about children's education, or someone died, and they don't have anybody to bury him [about raising funds].

The call for such meetings was often made door-to-door, meeting the neighbors personally, or writing small notes and leaving them under the front door of the house.

### Committees and Civics

The civics were, in short, residents' associations that dealt with the concerns of the people. They took different forms, but the typical civic had an executive committee, which comprised a chairperson, vice-chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer. The leaders would often be elected for three years, but they could be re-elected or recalled, upon the demand of the majority. The duty of the leaders was to report back to the communities in which they were based. A very important point is that the leaders were parts of these communities, facing the same problems as other residents. As Auntie Jane put it: "We were in the community fighting for the community," so "We can't as the leaders say to the community we want that or we demand that... they are using us and they tell us what to do." A culture of accountability was revealed itself in procedures during the meetings, in regular report-backs, and in continual communication with the residents.

The chairpersons' functions were basically those of coordination, calling meetings, and organization and preparation for campaigns. The idea of leadership as "serving the community" went hand-in-hand with a sensitive and careful attitude towards the decision-making process.

Civics interacted in different ways with more localized forms of self-organization like block, yard and street committees. Like the civics, these were formed to tackle specific problems, such as high rentals, poor electrification, bad housing, the bucket system and crime. In contrast to civics, where leadership tended to be dominated by more educated people, fluent in English or Afrikaans, with some political background, these local committees centered on ordinary township residents, often without political experience or organizing and facilitating skills. Like civics, these committees emerged in the late 1970s and proliferated in the 1980s.

In some cases, they were separate from the civics, and were more spontaneous local groups. The strongest and most democratic civics, however, were built on a solid foundation of yard, block and street committees. In these cases, the civic actually consisted of the committees operating in the township communities. One interesting example comes from Belville on the outskirts of Cape Town in the early 1980s, as reported in *Grassroots* newspaper:

The people of Belville realized that they needed a strong organization to fight for their rights. This meant that the organization had to represent everyone in Belville. So house meetings were held in all streets! And the people from each street elected a street representative. There are some of the duties of a street representative: 1. The street representative must know all the problems of the people in the street. 2. They must represent the needs of the street at representative committee meetings. 3. They must report all representative committee meetings to their street. 4. The representative committee is building unity in the area because it represents all the streets. 5. The street reps must not work alone, but with the help of all the people in the street. So the street rep is the link between the rep committee. In this way the people are working together to build a strong organization.

Then the street representatives in Belville joined the larger Cape Areas Housing Action Committee, which covered a number of neighborhoods and townships, and fought bad housing conditions. By coming together in CAHAC, people could share their experiences and find solutions to common problems and work together in common actions. And through street committees, set up by ordinary residents with mandated delegates, ordinary people could control the civic organization.

Another remarkable example comes from Alexandra township in Johannesburg, which was a hotbed of struggle, where radical unionists from the FOSTAU tradition played an important role. Moses Mayekiso, a metalworker from FOSATU and a leader of the Alexandra Action Committee, explained how the township was organized in the mid-1980s:

It was the pyramid structure. The people in the yard (because Alexandra is so overcrowded, there are about 4 houses in one yard, in one house you find there are 4 to 6 rooms, and in each room there is a family ... that's 4 times 8 number of people – sharing one tap, outside tap of water, sharing one toilet: you can imagine) ... would get together in one yard and create a yard committee to regulate a living conditions, so that there will be no conflict in the yard. Also that yard committee comes together to create a block committee: you put many yards ... from that street and that street and that's the block committee. Then from block committee, there will be a street committee, then area committee – up to the civic. People would come together to elect their leader, every street, democratically raise their hand and people would decide on their leadership.

### Media and Education

The 1970s and 1980s were also a time of a vibrant alternative press and media, which provided an alternative to the big business newspapers and the government-run broadcasting system. These helped share news, and ideas, and politics. For example, community-based newspapers such as *Speak* and *Grassroots* included numerous discussions about how to include more people into the decision-making process. Special study groups were launched by activists and community leaders in order to share knowledge on popular participation and democratic organization.

Respondents interviewed also pointed to other structures that emerged to organize people and raise their grievances, sometimes at meetings at people's houses, and sometimes in public mass meetings. One such experience was shared by Bricks Mokolo, an activist in Orange Farm community, who started to get involved into the struggle in the late 1970s.

In 1985, Bricks was elected a chairperson of the Vaal Parents'



Education Crisis Committee. Education crisis committees emerged as a response to the crisis in education, and drew in children and youth, as well as parents – and, where possible, teachers. It must be remembered that this was a time of massive revolts in black

*The 1980s showed the possibilities of self-rule from below. It illustrated the potential for cooperation between trade unions and community based organizations, ... and unprecedented levels of solidarity.*

African, Coloured and Indian schools, as well as in the universities, and that youth – including school-leavers, the unemployed, and those who were not studying – played a massive role in committees and civics, as well as education struggles, and in the unions. Class boycotts were common, and youth were in the forefront of clashes with the authorities.

Bricks explained: there are challenges facing your community that needs you and your child – everyone – to work together. We faced a lot of problems: houses, education, labor. Now we looked at the education problems, and we said we need parents to get involved into supporting our children at

school, and fighting or demanding the education right for our children, and there were demands that were put forward. One of the demands was free education, and one department for free education for all, including blacks.

### **“People’s Power” Takes Over**

The massive township struggles of 1984 to 1986 saw a huge growth in the power of the various organs of people’s power in the townships – block, yard and street committees; civics; student and youth groups; women’s associations; union structures based in neighborhoods; education crisis committees – and massive destabilization of apartheid local government. As Mayekiso noted, a focus on immediate problems led easily to an attack on the system as a whole:

The conditions that caused the formation of these organizations were bread and butter issues, but addressing these bread and butter issues automatically drives you to politics. “Why the streets are dirty? Why we are not getting houses?” So through these issues people got politicized and conscientized.

Effective township organizations, Mayekiso added, allowed extremely effective protest actions with high degrees of popular support. The formation of strong self-organized bodies made it possible to run massive campaigns:

at the beginning, when people would meet in the garage or in an open space in someone’s yard, and in the streets openly, [they would] ... get trouble by the police. But people defied and met. Not only the structure itself, the committees, but the actual meetings were the organs of people’s power, including the structures themselves...

General meetings, firstly, is where the grassroots democracy belongs, it’s actual people’s power; that’s the main basic organ of people’s power, therefore the main decisions comes from there, like the boycotts: the decision of boycotts would arise out of those meetings, from the grassroots.... ‘We’re not happy with the bus fares’... the decision to protest and to march is made there. If the committees can’t decide by themselves they have to send the idea at the general meeting, if it’s anonymous – it’s anonymous, or sometimes they vote. If it’s one who is opposed – it’ll be taken to a vote...

As protests grew, including attacks on state representatives, many areas became no-go areas for the police, and when the army was sent in, it faced resistance. The Black Local Authorities imposed by the apartheid government often collapsed, while councils in

Coloured and Indian areas lacked credibility. In many places, organs of people’s power displaced the BLAs. In townships like Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, Suttner noted in a 2004 article, self-organization reached a peak when “widely representative community elements took control of important aspects of township life and the fleeing of government officials left a vacuum, which the civic structures filled.”

This was the period in which street and civics started to run public services, when youth organizations created parks, and when people created self-defense and anti-crime patrols replaced the police in many areas. This understanding of struggle as self-empowering became central to anti-apartheid propaganda, and was articulated in slogans and concepts like “people’s power,” or “Amandla-Ngawethu.” These reflected the situation that was already happening on a mass scale. In 1986, when organs of people’s power had already emerged in many of the South African townships and when BLAs were falling, the exiled ANC leadership made its famous call for “ungovernability” and “people’s power.” The ANC in exile had recognized the strong potential and possibilities of self-organizing, and hoped to use it for the purposes of the party.

### **The End of the Revolt**

The apartheid state responded to the rebellions with repression, using extra-legal forces, such as vigilantes and hit squads, and the mobilization of the army, expansion of the police, and the auxiliary forces of the homeland regimes. The second State of Emergency in 1986 led to the arrest of more than 20,000 people, and involved the largest repressive operation in the history of South Africa. Police and army violence, including in detention, was common, and by the end of 1986 the state had suppressed (or at least, greatly weakened), many community-based organizations. The UDF was severely restricted in its operations, and a number of high-profile UDF figures, as well as activists like Mayekiso, were charged with treason.

The more intense the state repression, the worse the effect on the ability of people’s power to be successful. The arrest of many of the most experienced leaders also led to structures of accountability being undermined and escalating clashes with the security forces by youth, leading to a militarization of struggle and a decline in a broader community involvement.

But the apartheid state now knew that major reforms were needed. Efforts were made in the late 1980s to carry out reforms aimed at weakening the protest movement, and to reach out to the ANC. When transition period started in 1990, the ANC leadership worked hard to establish its hegemony over the community and youth structures and the unions, with the UDF shut down in 1991, many of its affiliate absorbed into ANC wings or into ANC-aligned groups. When the ANC came into power in 1994 the days of “people’s power” were gone, the movements of the 1980s co-opted or closed or sidelined. There was a process of depoliticization and a move a focus on state power, with the ANC-led state meant to “deliver” to the citizens.

### **Some Lessons**

It is important to note that not everything was perfect in the 1980s. There were power abuses, and important challenges to democratic practices. Some of the civics did not change leaders: this is explained by the domination of charismatic personalities, and, sometimes, the abuse of leadership positions. The fact that participation in any kind of resistance organization ran the risk of being arrested and charged meant many people were not willing



to take the risk of openly participating.

Civics faced challenges of gender and age inequalities: there was a generation gap between elder residents and the leaders of the civic associations consisted basically of youth, who sometimes imposed their will on the others. This could include using violence. There were tensions between civics and unions, in part because the unions wanted to ensure their autonomy and were wary of undemocratic practices in UDF-affiliated bodies. The ANC also exercised a growing influence behind the scenes, and ANC militants were often intolerant of non-ANC voices.

However, the period of mass self-organization in the 1980s showed the possibilities of the people's self-organization and self-rule from below. It illustrated the potential for cooperation between trade unions, community based organizations, and other types—youth, cultural, sports – and unprecedented levels of solidarity. It

showed mutual help projects, which created spaces of solidarity and communal support: soup kitchens, sewing collectives, community crèches, anti-crime patrols, defense units, and people's courts.

The radical interpretation of *democracy* deserves special attention. In the 1980s, democratic *practices*, like mass meetings, the accountability of leaders and committees, were important, and people also saw democracy its value to *struggles*.

Today, many of the principles of the self-organization of the 1980s, and the very culture of radical, participatory and direct, democracy, with its obligatory and absolute accountability of community leaders, with its special love for long and open meetings, are continued by some contemporary social movements in South Africa. I think that is the legacy of the 1980s, when many people believe that democracy was not an abstract idea, but rather a tool and practice, which must be used by the whole community.

# THE PLAYFUL ANARCHIST

BY BRIAN MARTIN

Play can be an inspiration for anarchists, but care is needed because not all play is liberating.

Anarchist analysis is often seen as a serious business. It deals with the repressive aspects of the state, the exploitative features of capitalism, and the dark sides of other systems of domination, none of which seem to be laughing matters. Anarchist campaigning can be serious too, because it means coming up against agents of the state. In the syndicalist tradition, the workplace is central, and work is commonly seen as the opposite of play.

Yet there is also a playful side to anarchism. The vision of a self-managed society is one in which desires can be collectively pursued. Without the whip of bosses, people can be more spontaneous, and games can be a part of a joyful life.

Although play can and should be part of the anarchist project, the implications are not always straightforward. My aim here is to see what insights concerning the goal of self-management can be gained by looking at several areas in which play can feature: children's toys and games, sports, video games, music, activism, economic productivity, and life itself. In other words, is it worth trying to be a playful anarchist and, if so, what does this entail? Finally, I present a few possible principles for playful anarchism.<sup>1</sup>

## Children's Play

Young children can have fun, especially together, with few or no props. They can play games with imaginary characters and imaginary props. Simple objects such as balls and boxes can be the basis for hours of play.

It is possible to look at children playing and see this as the manifestation of natural human capacities, even as a model for freedom. But although children's play is innocent in the sense of having no conscious political agendas, it can never be natural in the sense of being independent of society.

Play, by necessity, draws on culture. Children who play with imaginary characters are influenced by the people and images around them. If they watch television or play video games, their imaginations will be shaped by what they see and hear, whether this is Winnie the Pooh or Harry Potter. Children's play can be spontaneous in some ways, but it is spontaneous within a framework of the ideas and images provided by the surrounding culture, including the family, peers, and media.

Then there are objects, and again they may reflect culture. It

is possible to turn parts of nature – branches, rocks, fruit – into objects for play, and this seems innocuous. More common, though, are manufactured toys. Basic types range from balls to building blocks, which may reflect social values at a general level. Then there are more elaborate toys. The most famous is Barbie, a doll both highly popular and widely criticized for incorporating stereotypes about femininity.<sup>2</sup> Barbie, at least in her original incarnation, is blond, white and exceedingly thin, a model that if blown up to adult size is an impossible ideal for more than a few women. For boys, there are various masculinized dolls such as G.I. Joe as well as numerous guns and other war toys. As exposed by feminists, what is notable is how many manufactured toys are gendered in obvious or subtle ways.

Another problem with some manufactured toys is that, by being so elaborate, they can limit imagination. A ball provides less guidance for play than a toy battleship. Some toys can only be used in certain ways: their uses are built in.

The gendering of toys can be tied to capitalist markets: there is more profit to be made by selling different toys to boys and girls, and more profit from highly elaborate toys that look fantastic in advertisements but constrain children in how they are used.<sup>3</sup> Simple, sturdy, generic toys are cheaper to produce and do not need to be replaced every year.

It is easier to point to the problems with manufactured toys than to identify the sorts of toys that best prefigure a self-managed society. Are building blocks worthwhile, or do they limit imagination for the built environment? Should toy guns be avoided and, if so, what should be in their place? Who should make decisions about what sorts of toys are produced?

## Games and Sports

Children frequently play games that are called sports. There are individual sports such as swimming and tennis, and group sports such as soccer and basketball. For children, these can be played in a spirit of fun, for the exhilaration of using one's body and engaging with others.

For children, running can be spontaneous, for example when they chase each other. Running can also be turned into a more serious endeavor, in competitive events. A child might enjoy running and be encouraged to train more systematically.

Team sports can be more or less spontaneous. Children have to learn the rules, perhaps by observing older children, but often



instruction is involved, as when a parent helps a child learn how to kick and control a soccer ball. For soccer, minimal equipment is needed. For some other sports, more is required, for example rackets and courts for tennis and clubs and courses for golf. Participation then may depend on access to facilities.

Parallel to the fun side of sports is the more serious side, with competitions, leagues, systematic training, and professional careers. In competitive sports, having fun may be subordinated to status, winning and money. Nevertheless, even for professional athletes, love of the game often remains important, if only because motivation is harder to maintain if performing is seen only as a job.

The transformation of children's play to organized games to professional sports is not an automatic or even process. As testified by the popularity of fun runs, adults can participate mainly for enjoyment, including the satisfaction of improving fitness and developing skills, without worrying too much about winning. But the parallel side, professional sport, captures much more attention. News reporting focuses on elite performers and on who is winning, and the big money is in professional sports. Some top athletes become celebrities and role models, whereas neighborhood games are known only to those involved.

The problems associated with professional sports are well known. Prestige and money lead to a preoccupation with victory rather than participation. Athletes may wreck their health by playing while injured and, in contact sports, through damage during games. Gambling and corruption are risks. Most important, though, is the decline in participation. Many children play games but give them up as they get older and can no longer compete in organized leagues. They become spectators, a process encouraged by the companies that profit from professional sports.

As professional athletes become increasingly skilled, drawing on the latest exercise science and coaching, much of the population is becoming less fit, as shown by the rise in obesity. When children's play becomes adult professional sports, participation and wholesome exercise decline.

### Video Games

The problems with manufactured toys like Barbie are one thing. Of a very different sort are the problems with video games, a major market for children and many adults. The video game industry is larger than Hollywood.

Video games can be educational, though most are just for entertainment. Many of the most popular games feature fighting enemies, sometimes with sexist and violent imagery.

For many people, both children and adults, video games are a major activity. They involve a type of play that is intensely absorbing. Video game designers seek to make their games as enticing as possible. The ideal game – Super Mario Brothers is an example – is simple to learn, so it grabs players from the first few minutes, and is continually engrossing because the challenges increase as players become more proficient. The result is the satisfying state called flow, which occurs when engaged in a task requiring skills that is neither boring nor anxiety-producing.<sup>4</sup> Good video games provide exactly the challenges that induce flow, and some players spend

hours every day on a game, and a few addicts can hardly stop. A game can be so absorbing that hours pass in a flash.

There are also online games that involve multiple players, for example World of Warcraft, that are also highly engrossing. The game goes on and on, and some players don't want to miss a single development. The game becomes a community of common spirits, an attractive alternative to the flesh-and-blood interactions that occur offline.

Should anarchists embrace or reject video games? On the

negative side, many of the games are designed around violence and misogyny. However, it is also possible to design games with other values such as cooperation and egalitarianism. Also on the negative side, most games on the market are part of a massive industry whose primary aim is making money. However, some games are developed just for fun and are open source; commercialism is not an inevitable feature of video games.

Then there is the question of whether it is healthy to spend so much time interacting with a computer-generated world. For the body, outdoor games are definitely healthier. Video games can become addictive far more easily than addiction to physical exercise. Behavioral addiction is not the same as addiction to drugs but can be just as damaging.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another concern is that when video games become an alternative reality, the prospects for face-to-face human interaction are compromised. If people are to collectively make decisions about work, child rearing, services, and other issues affecting their lives, how do video games fit in? There is a problem if communication skills – being able to talk with others and discuss interests and concerns – are diminished because online activities take over. The addictive nature of video games may only be the beginning. Virtual reality can be even more captivating.

It is easy to say that anarchists should embrace play, but the addictive potential of video games suggests the embrace should not be too tight. Play needs to be balanced with other priorities.

### Music

Music, for many people, is one of the most delightful aspects of life. Unlike food and clothing, it is not required for existence. Instead, it is commonly enjoyed for its own sake. Most people listen to music, for example with iPods, radios, or at live venues. Although in some cases listening to music has a practical purpose, it is mostly for enjoyment.

Of course, music can be used to influence listeners, as in movie sound tracks, patriotic songs, or background music played in stores. Music can also be listened to in more formal settings, in churches, at rock concerts, and symphonic performances.

Music can also be enjoyed as a performer. Many people enjoy singing, even with little or no training. Many children learn to play musical instruments. Playing music can be primarily for pleasure or pursued as a career. Many children and youth learn to play instruments, and enjoy playing in bands, orchestras, and various types of ensembles. When schooling finishes, there are three main trajectories. A few of the most dedicated students continue their studies with the aim of becoming professional performers or music





teachers. A few others continue to play as amateurs. Most, though, stop playing their instruments.

In many parts of the world there is a small but thriving community of amateur musicians who get together to play solely for the love of it. It is organized by the players themselves or by networks of players coordinated by volunteers.<sup>6</sup> Decisions about what to play, when and where are usually made by consensus. People are not paid to play amateur music with each other, which means the possibilities for exploitation and domination are limited.

Professional music-making is a different story. Because it is paid work, sometimes playing becomes a chore. As well, opportunities for good jobs are limited, leading to competition and occasional sharp dealing. In some circumstances, players can be treated badly.

As a generalization, playing music is most likely to be satisfying when it is done voluntarily and cooperatively, organized by the players themselves. Amateur music is a model of self-managed activity.

It is important to mention that some professionals retain the love of their craft. In every occupation, some workers feel it is a calling, being just what they would want to do even if they were not paid. Some professional musicians continue to love playing music through their entire careers and keep playing after they retire from their paid jobs. This shows the possibility for work to be play.

### Protest and Play

Rallies, marches, and occupations are often seen as serious affairs, because usually protests are against some social problem such as war or racial violence. To counter the usual focus on doom and gloom, taking a humorous approach can be worthwhile.

In Serbia during the campaign against repressive president Slobodan Milosevic, the resistance movement Otpor used humor as a key tool. One stunt was to paint a picture of Milosevic on a barrel and then encourage members of the public to hit it with a stick. After police removed the barrel, Otpor announced that the barrel had been arrested! In a video looking like a washing machine advertisement, the stain on a T-shirt – a picture of Milosevic – is removed.<sup>7</sup> When the government claimed that Otpor – which was committed to nonviolence – was a terrorist organization, young Otpor activists ridiculed the government's claims by standing in front of crowds saying "This is what a terrorist looks like." In these and other actions, Otpor continually made fun of the government.<sup>8</sup>

Other groups around the world have used creative playful techniques in what have been called humorous political stunts.<sup>9</sup> When protesters are serious and present rational arguments for their concerns, those who disagree can come up with counter-arguments. When protesters use humor, this can bypass the rational mind. The use of absurdity and paradox can sometimes communicate truths more effectively than evidence and argument.

Anarchist sentiments have contributed to the history of playful activism, most notably through the Situationists and in the contemporary practice of culture jamming. Humor in protest can be deployed strategically while having a lot of fun doing it. As well, playful activism can be highly effective in attracting media attention. An extra advantage in humorous protest is that when audiences laugh, it is more enjoyable for protesters. Laughter is contagious, and humorous protest can brighten up activist planning.

### Play and Productivity

The usual idea is that play is something to do when work is finished. It is an optional extra in the struggle for survival, not essential but nice if you have the opportunity.

There is a quite different possibility, though: play can be pro-

ductive, in the sense that it contributes to economic performance. This is obvious enough in the vast investments in leisure activities, from sports to gaming, but there is also a more fundamental connection. At least that is the argument by Steven Johnson in his fascinating and entertaining book *Wonderland*.<sup>10</sup>

Johnson's argument is that humans' intrinsic interest in pleasure and amusement has contributed more to invention and industry than appreciated by conventional historians. He traces the popular craze for calico, an early colored cloth, and argues it was a factor in the industrial revolution. Colored clothing has no extra functional value, but it was and remains highly valued for purposes of fashion and pure delight. Johnson says the great popularity of calico was the motive force behind inventions crucial to industrialization.

The idea of shopping just to look at the goods on offer was, according to Johnson, an important social innovation that had implications for economic production. For people who find shopping a chore and deplore rampant commercialism, the idea of shopping as leisure may seem abhorrent, but many disagree, finding great pleasure in doing the rounds of shops and in buying goods, many of which are unnecessary. Johnson says calico had been available in northern Europe for over a century and only became a craze after the development of window displays, clustering of stores, and spectacular interiors.

Johnson also looks at the role of music in invention. The earliest musical instruments date back tens of thousands of years, suggesting that the inherent delight in certain types of sounds has been important in human cultural evolution. Johnson examines the origin of the idea of programmable machines, attributing some of the inspiration to the musical keyboard.

Taverns or pubs have a long history. Johnson describes a little-recognized function of pubs as incubators of free discourse, breaking down social boundaries, and even contributing to emancipatory sentiments, as in the cases of the U.S. independence struggle and the gay rights movement. The pub, as a social institution serving people's desire for pleasurable interaction, thus can also have a political significance.

Johnson's book *Wonderland* is filled with stories of the power of delight to stimulate innovation. However, he is quick to admit that play-inspired social changes are not necessarily for the better. The down side of the attraction for cotton cloth, seen as desirable for its sensual properties, was slavery and terrible working conditions. Likewise, the spice trade, driven by the sensory appeal of pepper, cloves, cinnamon and other exotic tastes, was implicated in the horrors of European colonialism. Contemporary examples can easily be provided, for example the horrible conditions for workers who produce toys and electronic gadgets.

### Life as a Game

One thing that makes games so enticing is that they are seen as realms separate from the messiness of regular life. In watching a football match or playing a video game, it's possible to forget about war, poverty, and workplace angst. The game has its own rules. Players and spectators do not have to worry about outside interventions. The game is self-contained, providing a sense of emotional security. Of course the separateness of games is an illusion, occasionally pierced, for example by reports of drug use or sexual abuse by football players. But for many players and spectators, it is a desirable illusion because it offers an escape from the "real world."

It is possible to use the idea of a game as a metaphor for all of life. What are the implications of seeing life as a game? One response is to seek to understand the rules and play the game



better. Interactions between people can be placed within a game framework: others are “opponents” making “moves” that can be countered by intelligent play.<sup>11</sup> In the life-is-a-game metaphor, the game of interpersonal politics is quite serious – nearly as serious as professional sports!

Another approach is to imagine life as a game as a means of overcoming excessive seriousness. The implication is to inject a sense of playfulness into daily life. Rather than being depressed by the burdens of obligation and social comparison, instead an attitude of amused detachment can be cultivated. This sort of approach has antecedents in quite a few philosophies and religions.

A few lucky individuals seem to go through life with an amused attitude, finding joy in everyday activities and seeking to brighten other people’s lives. They can be serious when necessary but do not get stuck in negativism. In the game metaphor, they are enjoying the play and not worrying too much about winning. In this, they seem to have maintained the spontaneous joy of living so often observed in young children.

Should an anarchist have a playful attitude towards life? Is it productive to adopt an attitude of lightheartedness when so many people are exploited and oppressed? Can it be beneficial to foster a playful spirit while doing what one can to bring about a better world? How can activists learn to be playful in ways that are helpful and inspirational rather than silly and awkward?

### Implications

For pursuing a self-managed society, what are the implications of play? A key point is that *play is important*. It is an aspect of freedom, which includes freedom to express creativity and joy.

Beyond this, it’s possible to identify a few principles a playful anarchist might consider. One is that play desirably should be inclusive, enabling many if not most people to participate if they so desire. In spectator sports, fans can be highly engaged and derive great pleasure from watching, but this is different from the satisfactions of personal involvement.

Another principle worth considering is cooperation. A self-managed society would operate largely through cooperation, so play desirably would likewise. However, cooperative sports are rare compared to competitive ones. There is much to be done to develop and promote cooperative games.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, play should be enhancing rather than destructive. It should foster better health, happiness, flow, community, and skills for self-management. This sounds like a lot to ask, but sometimes a well-designed game can achieve wonders, bonding players together in a cooperative endeavor that improves health and happiness, while coordinating the game involves self-management skills.

Although play has many desirable features, there are also some conundrums and traps. Should play be spontaneous or organized? Spontaneous activities sound like they should more playful, but sometimes spontaneity reproduces damaging patterns of interaction. It may be better to organize activities that consciously reflect goals.

Play should not be compulsory. One approach is to design opportunities for both organized and spontaneous play. Participation in play can be satisfying, yet there can be a danger of addiction. Like anything else, there can be too much of a good thing.

Finally, it is wise not to take play too seriously. For a playful anarchist, seeking to promote cooperative and participative play that enhances human capacities, it might be okay to behave less than ideally some of the time – to cheer for a favorite sporting team or to play the board game Monopoly or the video game Grand

Theft Auto – and not feel guilty. Prefiguration of a self-managed society is desirable, but it should not be such a duty as to inhibit living playfully in present-day society.

*Thanks to Sharon Callaghan and Majken Sørensen for valuable comments on a draft.*

### Notes

1. There is a vast amount of research about play. Two pioneering studies are J. Huitzinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-element in Culture* (Beacon, 1955) and Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (Free Press, 1961).
2. Mary F. Rogers, *Barbie Culture* (Sage, 1999).
3. Sharon Beder (ed.), *This Little Kiddy Went to Market: The Corporate Capture of Childhood* (Pluto, 2009).
4. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (Harper & Row, 1990).
5. Adam Alter, *Irresistible: Why We Can't Stop Checking, Scrolling, Clicking and Watching* (Bodley Head, 2017).
6. An example is ACMP Associated Chamber Music Players, <https://www.acmp.net>.
7. “The Stain,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEZYdGDkkV4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEZYdGDkkV4).
8. Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, *Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia* (Syracuse University Press, 2015).
9. Majken Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism: Creative Nonviolent Resistance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
10. Steven Johnson, *Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World* (Riverhead, 2016).
11. Eric Berne, *Games People Play* (Ballantine, 1964).
12. Terry Orlick, *Winning Through Cooperation: Competitive Insanity – Cooperative Alternatives*. (Acropolis, 1978).



## Charlie Chaplin vs patriotism

“As for politics, I’m an anarchist. I hate governments and rules and fetters... Can’t stand caged animals. People must be free.”

*What is your reason, Mr. Chaplin, for never having voted?*

I don’t believe in making any divisions of people. I think that any division ... is very dangerous. I think that leads to fascism. Citizens are citizens all the world over...

*Mr. Chaplin, you also said you are not a nationalist of any country, is that correct?*

True. ...

*Now, Mr. Chaplin, the Daily Worker on October 25, 1942, reported you stated ... “I’m not a citizen, I don’t need citizenship papers, and I’ve never had patriotism in that sense for any country, but I’m a patriot to humanity as a whole. I’m a citizen of the world. [with heavy sarcasm] If the Four Freedoms mean anything after this war, we won’t bother about whether we are citizens of one country or another.” Mr. Chaplin, ... the poor fellows who were drafted like myself, and their families and buddies, resent that remark...*

I don’t know why you resent that. ... I think it is rather dictatorial on your part to say as how I should apply my patriotism. ... Now, whether you say that you object to me for not having patriotism is a qualified thing. I’ve been that way ever since I have been a young child. I can’t help it. I’ve traveled all over the world, and my patriotism doesn’t rest with one class. It rests with the whole world – the pity of the whole world and the common people...

*Charlie Chaplin: Interviews*. University Press of Mississippi, 2005.



# Eco-Socialism, Eco-Anarchism, and the Anthropocene

REVIEW ESSAY BY WAYNE PRICE

Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*. Monthly Review Press, 2016.

Christophe Bonneuil & Jean-Baptiste, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*. Translated by David Fernbach. Verso, 2017; in French 2013.

Climate change, with its overlapping ecological, environmental and energy catastrophes, is increasingly conceptualized by earth scientists in terms of the “Anthropocene.” This is the topic of these two recent books, both well-written and informative. The term Anthropocene was brought into scientific discussion in 2000 by the climatologist Paul Crutzen. It refers to the interacting and holistic bio-geo-chemical world system – which, at a certain point, became profoundly influenced by human activity. The earth is described, by various biological and geological criteria, as having gone through a series of epochs: the Miocene, the Pliocene and the most recent Holocene, which lasted for about 11,500 years. An epoch of fairly stable climate, the Holocene covered most of human agricultural civilization.

But in the last quarter of the millennium the earth reached a new geological epoch. Huge changes have been caused by human society. Concentrations of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are at their highest levels in over 400,000 years. Twice as much nitrogen fertilizer is now used for agriculture as had previously been used naturally worldwide. Human population growth has increased ten times in three centuries. There are over a billion methane-producing cattle. Tropical rainforests are being destroyed. 20 to 50 percent of the land surface is exploited. Energy use in the twentieth century rose 16 times. Sulfur dioxide emissions are over two times natural levels. There has been a 25 percent decline of fish in upwelling ocean regions. The land and the oceans are filled with virtually indestructible plastics.

The results have included the dying off of plant and animal species at an unprecedented rate, the loss of crops and other food sources, increases in both drought and flooding, and the upsetting of social stability in greater and greater areas. If not interrupted, the climate will climb to levels of heat to which neither humans nor other organisms were adapted by evolution. This is not only a matter of overall climate, but of variations in the weather, increasingly leading to extremes – especially extremes of heat – well beyond what humans and our fellow animals can withstand.

There are various opinions on when the Anthropocene epoch should be said to begin. Regardless of technical definitions, there have been two key turning points in human/natural co-evolution. One was the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. Among other effects, this went from a social reliance on power from wind, water, and human and animal muscle, to a massive use of coal. This began the spewing of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Meanwhile it concentrated population into big cities, breaking the natural metabolic cycle by which food production was replenished by returning wastes to the soil. And it stepped up the imperialist looting of natural resources from the poorer, colonized, countries.

The second major turning point was the period after World War II. At this time, there was a great increase in production of petroleum oil. This became the major source of industrial energy,

more than the continuing use of coal, also natural gas (and the new use of nuclear power). Oil became the main fuel for transportation and heating. It powered the production of electricity. Food production relied on it for artificial fertilizer and pesticides, as well as for transportation and farm machinery. Clothes depended on oil-based artificial fibers. Medicine needed it for chemicals. Housing, packaging and just about everything else used it for plastic.

As a result, there was a vast expansion in greenhouse gases, tropical forest loss, ocean acidification and terrestrial biosphere degradation beginning around 1950. The overall increases in production, population and biosphere degradation has been called the “Great Acceleration.”

These results went along with the post-World War II prosperity, which bourgeois economists have called the “Golden Age of Capitalism.” There was a great expansion of production and a rising standard of living, at least for the mostly white populations of the industrialized countries.

For about twenty or thirty years, the business cycle was fairly mild, with no return to the stagnation of the Great Depression. Many believed that the ills of capitalism had been solved forever, due to a moderate use of government intervention in the market economy (Keynesianism). But research shows that *the post-war boom was paid for by a massive attack on the earth system*. The world capitalist class has been like farmers who eat up their seed corn, or like manufacturers who fail to put aside a fund to replace their machinery when it wears out. There was no regard for the long-term costs of using “cheap” oil, such as pollution, global warming, and the increased expense of accessing new supplies. Global metabolic rifts opened in the most basic of biochemical cycles. Now the post-war prosperity is over (since about 1970), but the dire effects on the biosphere continue. Working people can still win some limited gains, such as higher wages or a delay in some aspects of global warming, but overall, humanity is now living in a period of economic stagnation and environmental deterioration.

As both books point out, those who mostly caused and mostly benefitted from the destruction of so much are not the whole of humanity (all of “anthropos”). The rich nations – 25 percent of the world – had the most prosperity and caused the most damage, while the rest of humanity caused the least damage but is suffering the worst of the effects of global warming and pollution. Within the rich and poor nations, it is the poorer parts of the populations who had gained the least and who are suffering the most due to climate change and other ecological disasters. Even liberal geologists are aware of this social differentiation and comment on it.

Both volumes argue that the cause of these catastrophes is not simply social differentiation. Nor is it industrial technology as such. It is possible to imagine a different industrial development without a reliance on nonrenewable, polluting and destructive fossil fuels. As stated above, the problem is not overpopulation in itself, since it is the less populated but more developed part of the globe which cause the major environmental effects.

The problem is the capitalist system. It is driven by competition and class conflict to expand, to grow, to accumulate. Each firm and all firms together must accumulate, must grow or die. This results in a dynamic system which produces ever more goods



and productive capacity. But its drive to grow comes in conflict with the earth system, whose ecology requires a harmonious cycle of balanced metabolism, where what is taken out is restored by what is put back in. Capitalist firms care only for their increase in abstract wealth (money). They do not care about the cost to the workers whom they squeeze to make as much profit as possible, nor do they care about the cost to the natural world.

*There could be a new phase in the Anthropocene, one in which a conscious humanity works with, not against, the rest of nature.*

Some eco-socialists prefer to use the term “Capitalocene.” Bonneuil & Fressoz (2017) use this as the title of one chapter. Angus (2016) prefers the term “Anthropocene,” which is consistent with the usage of earth scientists. It is human beings that are drastically affecting the earth system, but humans organized in the social system of “fossil capitalism.” This is a capitalist economy built primarily on the use of carbon-based fuel sources. Both books review the history of fossil capitalism.

### **Anarchism and Eco-socialism**

Capitalism needs to be replaced with a human system which is cooperative, democratic, and produces for use rather than for profit: socialism. “The word *ecosocialism* [means]... that there can be no true ecological revolution which is not socialist and no true socialist revolution which is not ecological.” (Angus 2016; 202) But an ecologically oriented socialism cannot be in the authoritarian tradition of a state-organized, centralized, planned-from-the-top-down system where workers are still exploited. Angus appears to be a Marxist who comes out of this tradition.

Angus regards the Soviet Union as a form of socialism which somehow made mistakes. “The destructive policies of Stalin and his successors were a world-historical catastrophe, but the experience shows that an alternate path was possible.... The adoption of ultra-productivist and anti-environmental policies was a defeat for the socialist cause in the USSR.” (210) Actually, “ultra-productivism” and “anti-environmentalism” were not due to the mistaken “adoption” of wrong “policies.” They were the inevitable result of Stalinist pseudo-socialism – a state capitalism which had an inner drive to accumulate, to grow or die.

However, in our time there is a new development: writers and theorists of the ecology/environmental/climate-justice movement have been raising decentralist concepts as part of their programs. They include moderate liberals, radical ecologists, and even Marxists. Mostly they have no idea that they are redeveloping anarchism. (Price, 2016)

These ecological thinkers and activists find that an ecologically balanced system needs to be *a more decentralized, communal, self-managed, and federated society*. This implies eco-anarchism.

Almost in passing, Angus quotes Fred Magdoff on the need to “develop worker and community control of factories, farms, and other workplaces.... [and] promote truly democratic political and economic decision-making for local, regional, and multiregional needs.” (196-7) He refers to an “ecological agriculture; defending local food production and distribution” (198) and the need for an “energy system... replacing carbon-based fuels... with clean sources of energy under community control.” (207) But he does not develop the implications for technology, urban and rural planning, and a non-statist “politics.”

Bonneuil & Fressoz also “acknowledge that the actual socialism of the twentieth century was not ecological” (2017; 41). Like Angus they misuse “socialism” to mean pseudo-socialist state-capitalism. However, they are clearer than Angus in indicating that

a real eco-socialism would mean a challenge to existing (capitalist-developed) forms of technology and social organization. “Plans for local energy reduction, transition towns, etc. ... can open new spaces for strong democracy, new participatory forecasting and policy-making, and new social inclusiveness.” (43) They cite the work of a whole series of eco-socialist, bioregionalist and Green theorists who have considered how industry and living could be re-organized ecologically, on a human scale.

### **A Working Class Movement?**

Angus quotes Naomi Klein, “Only mass social movements can save us now.” (212) We cannot rely on politicians and business people. Angus argues, “We are not yet strong enough to win permanent solutions by ending the capitalist system, we must work to build counterpower.... We can make the political and economic costs of inaction unacceptable to our capitalist rulers, and in doing so we can win time for Earth and humanity.” (214) He wants to build an international movement of “indigenous people, small farmers and peasants, progressive activists and working people of all kinds, determined to save the world from the rich and powerful.” (217)

Bonneuil & Fressoz point out that there has been a long history of working people resisting capitalist industrialism’s ecological destruction. “The existence, since the 18th century, of an ‘environmentalism of the poor’ fighting for social justice and environmental decency, active both in core countries and in the periphery.” (253) “As a result of their impact on the environment, and because they deeply altered ways of living, the major technologies of the Anthropocene have aroused opposition both general and specific.” (276)

However, like Klein and other radical ecologists, neither book sees a central role for the working class in their projected movement. They ignore the potential power of the workers of all lands. Potentially, the workers could stop the machinery of death and start it up again in a different way. No other social force could do this. Naturally, the capitalists do all they can to keep workers in opposition to environmentalism, claiming that it costs jobs and income. Eco-socialists should be doing all that we can to find ways of winning over workers and their communities to see that radical ecology is their cause.

For example, Angus points out that rising heat will affect the working conditions of a great many workers (including, but not only, agricultural and outdoor workers). Capitalists will pressure workers to keep up production despite the new and worsening conditions. “Only militant organization for mutual protection by the workers affected can prevent climate change from becoming a leading cause of death on the job in this century.” (102) Other connections between the environment and workers, both direct and indirect, need to be raised as part of an eco-socialist/eco-anarchist program.

The question raised by these books is whether the oppressed and exploited of humanity can rally themselves, become aware of the terrible threat of ecological catastrophe, and act. If the world’s people do nothing, industrial capitalism will grind on until civilization as we know it will be doomed. But there is an opportunity for the international working class and its allies among all the oppressed to save humanity and the earth system. There could be a new phase in the Anthropocene, one in which a conscious humanity works with, not against, the rest of nature.

**Reference:** Wayne Price (2016), “Eco-Socialism and Decentralism: The Re-Development of Anarchism in the Ecology/Climate Justice Movement.” [www.anarkismo.net/article/28974?search\\_text=Wayne+Price](http://www.anarkismo.net/article/28974?search_text=Wayne+Price)



# Debt: Anarchist Economics

REVIEW BY CHAD ANDERSON

David Graeber, *Debt: the First 5000 Years*. Melville House, 2011.

FW Graeber has been working very hard to deliver contemporary anarchist scholarship that is consistent with the history of anarchist thought and consistent with the classics reviewed and discussed in these pages. This represents the best of the anarchist tradition in echoing Kropotkin's work to align science and anarchism and Graeber has in fact been working to forge an anarchist anthropology (see his *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 2004, from Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago).

Prior to examining the volume in detail, it must be noted that this book is significant, should be read widely, and hopefully represents a new thread in anarchist scholarship. The tone of the book is casual and not excessively technical, and yet is serious and engages very naturally with a broad scholarly literature from a variety of disciplines.

David Graeber is an anthropologist at the London School of Economics, anarchist, and activist who has attracted a great deal of attention through his participation in and support of the Occupy and other movements (and is also a fellow worker in the IWW). This volume is several years old but has attracted serious attention from activists and engaged academics, and has been around long enough to have inspired some spirited debate and academic response.

The title, *Debt*, suggests a sort of immediate parallel with Marx's *Capital*, though it is clearly not Graeber's intent to create an anarchist version of Marx's work. However, this book represents a major advance in anarchist economics and deserves to be studied by those looking to understand the basis for the contemporary world and the nature of the systems of domination and oppression that envelop us. In particular, this book is based in addressing the debt crisis and the capitalist crisis that came to a head in the fall of 2008 and are still working themselves out with an uncertain outcome.

*Debt* stands in contrast to Eric Buck's contribution to *Contemporary Anarchist Studies* (reviewed in the Fall 2106 issue) where he addressed anarchist economics by connecting anarchism with Taoism, the work of Gar Alperovitz regarding participation, Parecon, and the ongoing interest in cooperatives, connecting it all to Taoist flow and anarchist activism with a call for a general theory of anarchist economics. While moral and philosophical ideas undoubtedly may be powerful sources of inspiration, they are unlikely to lay as strong a foundation for anarchist economics as the scientific work done by classical anarchist theorists engaged in struggle such as Kropotkin, Bakunin and Rucker or as experienced through practical struggles by anarcho-syndicalists and allied workers to manage unions, businesses and even economies according to these sound principles. This work contributes to and builds on this latter thread by trying to use scientific means of inquiry to explain the world apart from ideology.

Graeber seems well-poised to add to the advancement of anarchist economics as an activist and academic who, in this volume, provides some deep theoretical thinking to allow for the deconstruction of systems of power and domination that can then be resisted and replaced. This work looks to be a strong potential source of future anarchist scholarship that can be merged with the practical experience gleaned from anti-capitalist struggle to provide guidance for future activists.

The book opens by discussing a moral confusion over how people and societies feel about debt. On the one hand, debts must

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be paid. To show the power of this idea, Graeber cites his personal experience with a progressive individual who was uncomfortable with his work to liberate people from the shackles of debt. On the other hand, there is the idea that loaning money is usury and is in itself morally bad, citing the numerous religions that have outlawed lending or at least cast money lending in a bad light. Getting to the peak of the issue as a moral one, he shows examples from religions that are supportive of debt, including an example of a Buddhist scholar struggling to demonstrate the evil done by an abusive lender in the face of scriptures that call for the payment of debts. Graeber uses the overall confusion to highlight how the international banking and international aid systems have saddled developing nations with obviously illegitimate debts siphoned off by corrupt elites that are then repaid by the general population, often at the cost of lives when essential services are cut back to service odious international debts.

The second chapter engages directly with and criticizes orthodox mainstream economics, calling it out for some of its basic myths based on false or misunderstood anecdotes and counters with copious real-world examples drawn from anthropology. This particularly starts with the discussion of the origins of money, which continues as a thread through a number of chapters. The standard economic narrative is that monetary exchange arose from the difficulty in using barter for exchange. The story goes that economies started with barter, developed money, and then moved on to systems of credit. Graeber provides strong examples that demonstrate the failure of this standard economic story to comport with historical examples and demonstrates that even the historical examples that such foundational economic luminaries as Adam Smith referred to do not support their case when examined more closely.

In place of the classical economic story that lists assumptions and then deduces a world where they were true, Graeber relies on a variety of evidence gathered in several disciplines and demonstrates that credit comes first, money follows as needed, and barter arises largely as a cumbersome substitute to manage monetary exchanges without money or when money is not available among people already aware of money. The foundational orthodox economic idea that societies based on barter have ever existed is shown to be a fantasy.

In the third chapter, Graeber takes a long look into the nature of credit and debt. He examines the concept of primordial debt, whereby there is a religious/philosophical argument that the creator(s) created humanity, which then owes a debt that is repaid through sacrifice. This argument is then generalized to the debt individuals owe to society that they repay through taxes. Graeber rejects this formulation as an *ex post facto* statist justification projected into the past without any real evidence that anyone advanced money on the basis of this primordial debt. He concludes by rejecting the state/market dichotomy, showing that it is states that bring markets into being and that markets support states through their activity.

The fourth chapter takes up the question of whether money represents a commodity or an IOU. Graeber finds it is both, but also offers an extended commentary drawing from Nietzsche and the Bible and other sources to mock the very concept of debt between those who are not equals. The blatant unfairness and social instability of mass debt is then explained as the basis for historical debt cancellation in ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Jewish Jubilees,



and revolutionary uprisings that burn debt records.

In chapter five, Graeber finds anthropological evidence for three economic moralities in contrast to the dominant focus of economics on mutual exchange. He refers to these moralities as communist, exchange and hierarchy. Here, he does not mean communist in the sense of anarcho-communist or Marxist-Leninist but instead systems based on the dictum from the *Critique of the Gotha Program* of "From each according to ability, to each according to need." Exchange is the straightforward exchange of standard economics that depends on a mutual trade between equals. Hierarchy is the basis for the maintenance of relationships among unequals.

He indicates that these moralities are not mutually exclusive between societies, but exist in mixed form in all societies and even in groupings not considering themselves as societies. For example, nuclear families usually operate on a communist basis, while social divisions are managed by hierarchies. There are even interactions and relationships that span moralities as when a debt entered into as an exchange among equals is transformed into a hierarchical relationship between a creditor whose wishes are respected and a supplicant debtor. Contemporary orthodox economics imagines all economic relationships as involving reciprocity in extrapolation of the market idea, but Graeber shows that there always exist non-reciprocal economic relationships in any society.

Continuing to search for the origins of money, chapter six raises the idea of human economies whereby some sort of currency is used to arrange and manage human relations along the line of blood wealth but not as a general currency for everyday exchange. These forms of money arise by following the form of wampum or some other currency like cloth or precious metals used to decorate and adorn the body. They are not used for actual exchange but to signify and seal arrangements surrounding marriages or the settling of feuds or as compensation for deaths. Here the currency is not a form of exact exchange for the human life being symbolically traded but as a stand-in for the debt or an acknowledgement that a debt in human life cannot be repaid because human life is unique and cannot be replaced. Thus, there is a symbolic purchase of wives with a sort of currency not in general circulation, but human beings are not actually bought and sold using this currency unless there is some sort of intervention through violence accompanied by a general trade regime as through the slave trade. People (and by extension, things) become truly saleable in a human economy only when they are ripped from their context, and this must be accomplished by force. Graeber connects these elements to assert, "If we have become a debt society, it is because the legacy of war, conquest, and slavery has never completely gone away." Here we begin to see the origins of our familiar economic institutions as being based in violence. The connection to the slave trade, based on and made possible through a system of credits and debts, is used as the entrée into the further development of money in chapter seven.

The rise of honor cultures is linked to slavery (people with no honor) and prostitution (women with no honor). The rise of slavery is based on commerce and markets. The Greek example shows the transition from money to pay soldiers and debts to government. This brings an aristocracy that held on to honor in order to reject the new money values, but the focus on honor meant a protection of the virtue of women as extension of male honor, leading to the covering of "respectable" women and their removal from the public sphere. Impersonal money is not exclusive in the way personal-relationship based exchanges are and thus introduces what Graeber refers to a "democratization of desire," as anyone could hope for

anything they could want to buy so long as they had the money.

Chapter seven extends the same discussion to honor and degradation as the origins of contemporary civilization. Honor is defined as surplus dignity (as those without dignity have no honor). Slavery is violently ripping people out of a context where they have honor into a situation where they otherwise would have died. Medieval Ireland placed a price on honor and human dignity. Patriarchy arose in Mesopotamia in a context where men came to have control over the honor of the women in their charge such that the loss of a woman's honor cost the honor of her patriarch. Men could sell the honor of women, as into marriage. The early Greek word for price was also originally the word for honor. They ran on a system of honor and heroism as a sort of credit. Rome revealed its definition of freedom in the context of property and slavery. Freedom was an absence of slavery but property was also a condition of freedom. He shows how Roman property laws were derived from master-slave laws. Here Graeber indicates that the modern elimination of slavery (to the extent it truly has even been eliminated), through alienation from freedom is still a concept as, while men no longer sell their children or themselves into bondage to pay off debts, they freely rent it out in the form of wage labor.

Next Graeber describes the evolution of Bronze Age economies on the basis of simple credit systems that often involved debts in the form of tallies, kept with marks, or with sticks or other devices depending on culture. Abuses of the resulting debts by landlords following a succession of bad harvests or abusive practices gave rise to anti-debt revolts where the priority of the peasants would be to cancel out and destroy the records of debts. These revolts gave rise to the practice of mass debt forgiveness and jubilees where debts would be reset to zero to forestall abuses and society-shattering revolts.

The need for coin, specifically, gold and silver (so fetishized as commodity money supposedly representing true value), arose purely with the need for professional armies during the rise of early states. Soldiers would have no static relationships with a community where they could trade credit and needed a form of payment that could be accepted everywhere. Graeber gives evidence for how ancient civilizations traded in credits even when there were bullion currencies. The value placed on coins came from that they were accepted by the government as payment of taxes. The only universal value they had was that all nations accepted gold and silver (commodity money). Some nations used non-bullion coins or bars, which were freely accepted within a country but lost value when in exchange outside of their borders (fiat money). In addition, the major problem with debasing metal coins was their exchange outside the nation where they needed to be traded for something else and needed a consistent value. War created the need for bullion and war would seize slaves who could be traded for bullion. The government would accept taxes paid in bullion (or its equivalent).

Graeber then explains the Axial Age of 800BC to 600AD. This time saw the rise of materialism in contrast to the idealism of the Confucian, Christian, Buddhist and other religions of the period. Here the market emerges alongside the government as part of the administration of paying for mercenaries and "the market, the state, war and religion all continually separate and merge with one another." He refines the argument of the rise of military-coin-slave economies to connect with the rise of materialism, notions of profit, and of substance. Attempts were made to connect material concepts of markets to religion, but they were unsuccessful, leading to idealist religion. He notes the major resistance movements of this period as ones for peace. Therefore human activities came to



become increasingly divided into different spheres with different values such as the market for greedy acquisition of material wealth and religion for charitable pursuit of transcendent goals.

The Middle Ages, defined here as 600-1450AD, produce an interesting discussion by Graeber as he defines India, China and the Islamic world as being quintessentially Middle Age long before Christian Europe, in contradiction to the usual way of defining the Middle Ages as a purely European phenomenon. His explanation was that the era began everywhere with the collapse of empires, conquest and acquisition ceased to be celebrated as the primary political goals, the connection between slavery and war and bullion was disrupted, most of Eurasia returned to virtual systems of credit even where coinage technically existed, and religions came to control the economy, frequently suppressing or at least curtailing predatory lending. The Middle Ages saw the first paper money (in China), the first markets independent of the state (Islamic ones managed by devout merchants who did not trust the state to be scrupulous in religious affairs), and the first corporations (derived from corporate-like bodies that took similar forms all across Eurasia).

Chapter eleven introduces capitalism under the "Age of the Great Capitalist Empires." It saw a return to slavery and to bullion, but also struggled to maintain virtual credit currencies, and led to paper money based on bullion. He sees a particular savagery coming from capitalist imperial enterprises such as the need to relieve the humiliation of debt pressures driving the mass enslavements in the Spanish Americas. The demand for slaves from Africa likewise distorted and corrupted African societies. Everywhere capitalism advances, it does so through violence and is held in place with violence. Graeber also makes considerable note of the tendency of capitalism to be unable to envision its own stable future. There is a perpetual terror at the top that the whole enterprise is going to fall apart in an apocalypse. When confidence arrives that the system will last, investors (over and over again in examples from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the present) behave as though current trends will last forever and drive speculative bubbles so insane it is hard to believe they existed for a time before they inevitably take the system down, requiring violence to maintain it until the next exuberant bubble. He also has an extensive discussion of interest (generally forbidden as immoral in the Middle Ages), credit and impersonal credit money.

Finally, Graeber dates the beginning of something new and yet to be determined from the removal of the US from the gold standard (i.e. a return to a form of virtual credit). He goes through the familiar litany of problems of rising US military spending in line with debt, the disconnect between productivity and wages, and all of the debt crises leading up to the 2008 crisis. He suggests that the Keynesian solution is not viable as it was really only operational to a small proportion of the population and collapsed when it expanded too far. He does not lay out any blueprint for the future, but says that we have an unprecedented opportunity to free ourselves. It is too early to see what the new era will bring but that there is a new opportunity to bring an end to empire and refashion systems based on human beings and meeting human need.

This brief review does not do justice to the rich and deep discussion across a number of disciplines presented in this fascinating tome. Graeber certainly demonstrates that he is serious about understanding the world while struggling to make it better and free of domination. This is also a very accessible book (despite its length), written in non-technical plain English. This work is consistent with Graeber's own assertion in his piece on academic anarchism

that anarchist schools of thought arise from organic principles and practices. On this basis, this is a major and foundational work that demands many responses and more criticism and debate.

*Jacobin* magazine has featured some of that debate. Mike Beggs, a *Jacobin* editor and University of Sydney lecturer in political economy, takes up a serious critique of Graeber in "Debt: The First 5000 Pages" with the subtitle "We need more grand histories. But 5000 years of anecdotes is no substitute for real political economy." This prompted a response from JW Mason, a CUNY assistant professor of economics, "In Defense of David Graeber's Debt."

Beggs begins with "Graeber presents himself as a maverick overturning convention," which seems to be a dig at Graeber for being skeptical of neoclassical economics and the claims that it makes based on its own myths. Beggs clearly does not like this book. Mason places *Debt* in the context of debates within economics as supportive of non-orthodox economists who are more likely to support the politics Beggs advances.

Beggs complains that:

In place of a materialist economic history, Graeber's 5000 years are organized according to a purported cycle of history in which humanity is perpetually oscillating between periods of "virtual money" – paper and credit money – and periods of metal money.

*Everywhere capitalism advances, it does so through violence and is held in place with violence...*

However, Graeber is writing a history of debt where the first use of money appeared to be virtual, coins emerged, fell out of use, then came back but were not plentiful enough and had to be augmented by paper money. It seems that Beggs really is uninterested in the story Graeber has to tell so really should not have bothered to fill it in with what he thought Graeber had to say. He glosses over Graeber's actual argument about the end of the gold standard to say that Graeber believed it was about "changing minds about the nature of money." Mason notes that "What Beggs calls the 'modern' position is really the orthodox mainstream position, precisely what is rejected by old Keynesian and more heterodox economists."

Mason responds to Beggs' argument that "there is an economics-shaped hole in *Debt*, but can't help worrying that there's a debt-shaped hole in his economics." Mason notes that Beggs and Graeber differ on the basis of the nature of commodity money (based on a fixed value of a commodity like gold), fiat money (based on the creation by a state), and credit money (what Graeber calls virtual money). Beggs finds commodity money to stand in distinction to fiat and credit money because only commodity money is related to a commodity. Graeber disagrees (along with Mason), and finds that commodity and fiat money both depend on the power of the state whereas credit money can be created by virtually anyone.

Beggs' major and animating complaints are focused around capitalism: "But you would think this century and a half fairly important for understanding our present situation. ... The story of the origins of capitalism, then, is not the story of the gradual destruction of tradition communities by the impersonal power of the market." He attributes to Graeber the claim that "It is, rather, the story of how an economy of credit was converted into an economy of interest; of the gradual transformation of moral networks by the intrusion of the impersonal – and often vindictive – power of the state." Graeber is not making an argument about the rise of capitalism, but rather about the change of the structure and nature of debts under capitalism. Again dismissively, Beggs asserts "that is Graeber's explanation for the rise of capitalism. *Evil: the root of all money.*" No, that is not what Graeber had to say. Graeber notes the



transformation of debt under capitalism as a horrific force. Mason adds that Beggs “thinks that Graeber is moralistically arguing they were just for some reasons insanely greedy. But Graeber is saying just the opposite of this – that they acted as if they were insanely greedy only because of their need for money to satisfy a newly expansive and morally binding web of debts.”

Beggs’ final line dismisses Graeber’s different discipline with its line of argumentation with “Stringing together 5000 years of anecdotes is not enough.” This is unfortunate, because I am sure that the book could have used a more rigorous critique that was not so apparently animated by personal and professional pique.

Mason, an economist, points to three significant economic contributions in the book: 1. Money is logically and historically first a unit of social account and not a facilitator for exchange; 2. There is a cash money regime and a credit money regime that have existed in different times and places with different social and cultural divides and implications; 3. Changes on money or credit supply have important real effects that are political, particularly when managed by states. Mason goes on to offer minor criticisms, but largely argues for the book being read as a complement to existing economics literature, though he finds its rich descriptions (outside the scope of his review) advancing more general “dissection of the social and political-economic processes that create notions of

quantified obligations and the machinery for their enforcement.”

While he has succeeded in a major piece of mainstream scholarship, Graeber, in his *Contemporary Anarchist Studies* piece, suggests anarchist studies promote an ethical discourse based in practice. He has done an excellent job of doing just that with this very significant book that demands the attention of scholars and practitioners and helps to bring the contemporary anarchist project back to the roots of its classical advocates.

## Graeber on Bureaucracy

REVIEW BY JEFF STEIN

David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Melville House Publishing, 2015.

*The Utopia of Rules* is a collection of essays written by anthropologist David Graeber. Graeber is best known for his work *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* and his role as mentor of the Occupy Wall Street protest. In *Utopia* Graeber argues that what the left needs is a theory and critique of bureaucracy. Drawing on the theories of sociologists like Max Weber, Graeber attributes the growth of bureaucracy to a desire to have rules. To enforce the rules, bureaucrats resort to violence, beatings, incarceration and threats of both. (Graeber refers to police as “armed bureaucrats” whose main

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function is not to hunt down violent criminals or terrorists, but to impose fines and penalties, beat or shoot otherwise peaceful citizens.)

Modern society is complicated and people desire control over their lives. The last thing they want is to have to deal with arbitrary authority. Laws are passed, regulations are made, standards are created, all with the purpose of controlling authority. Unfortunately, the rules often are poorly written and tend to be enforced arbitrarily by bureaucrats. Graeber argues that all attempts at reform, however, create the opposite effect intended: the growth of more bureaucracy. This even holds true for "deregulation," which Graeber considers a euphemism for just changing rules, not getting rid of them.

While I enjoyed parts of the book, I think Graeber is not particularly helpful to understanding bureaucracy or providing any solutions for the problems of bureaucratic authority. Graeber has fallen into a common mistake of many anarchists by confusing administration with bureaucracy. Anarchists, at least those who recognize the need for social organization even in a stateless society, do not dispute the need for rules and for administration. The real question is who makes the rules and for whose benefit?

Peter Kropotkin, one of the founders of "anarchist anthropology," explained this in his classic study "The State: Its Historic Role":

On the other hand the State has also been confused with Government. Since there can be no State without government, it has sometimes been said that what one must aim at is the absence of government and not the abolition of the State.

However, it seems to me that State and government are two concepts of a different order. The State idea means something quite different from the idea of government. It not only includes the existence of a power situated above society, but also of a territorial concentration as well as the concentration in the hands of a few of many functions in the life of societies. It implies some new relationships between members of society which did not exist before the formation of the State. A whole mechanism of legislation and of policing has to be developed in order to subject some classes to the domination of others.

There is a big difference between maintaining rules and holding people accountable when the rules are arrived at by mutual consent and negotiation, and enforcing rules made by a powerful elite through use of force or threats of violence. Graeber misses Kropotkin's point when he quotes Kropotkin praising international postal agreements. Graeber tries to argue that Kropotkin saw the post office as a model for the bureaucratic utopia of the future, when in fact Kropotkin had it the other way around. If the various postal systems of the world could figure out how to exchange mail across international borders without a state forcing them to do it, why couldn't the same voluntary methods work within national borders?

Perhaps the simplest way to explain the difference between a person doing administrative work and a bureaucrat is to borrow Graeber's definition of a policeman. If a cop is an "armed bureaucrat," a bureaucrat is an "empowered administrator." Certainly someone with the power to use rules and their official status to take away a person's job, seize personal possessions, deny a livelihood, or ostracize someone from a community, without due process nor accountability to the whole community is by definition a bureaucrat. The only way to deal with arbitrary authority is to make sure it is not arbitrary. Anarchists have not only had the most powerful critique of bureaucracy but have had a solution from the beginning of our movement. We call it "self-management" or "direct democracy"

at all levels of society.

## Fighting the War in Spain

REVIEW BY JEFF STEIN

Joaquín Pérez Navarro with contributions from Luis Monferrer, **One Man's War in Spain: Trickery, Treachery and Thievery.** Translated, edited and annotated by Paul Sharkey, 2013. Available online from Christie Books.

Stuart Christie has been providing an invaluable service to the anarchist movement by publishing and keeping available not only anarchist classics but historical biographies of Spanish anarchists able to provide us with eye witness accounts of the Spanish Revolution and its aftermath. *One Man's War* is a collection of articles, essays, interviews and historical documents by one such anarchist, Joaquín Pérez Navarro, a veteran of the Durruti column and Friends of Durruti.

Joaquín Pérez Navarro joined the anarcho-sindicalist CNT Foodworkers' Union in 1919 after becoming a waiter at the age of 12. As he learned more about anarchism and syndicalism, the young Joaquín joined an affinity group of four members that was to play an important role in a number of strikes and direct actions which included a jailbreak of imprisoned CNT strikers. When the Spanish Army revolted against the Republic in 1936, Pérez helped storm the Atarazanas barracks, the same assault in which Francisco Ascaso was killed. After the victory in Barcelona, he joined the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of the Durruti Column and headed out towards Saragossa with the rest of the militias.

Like many in the Durruti column, Joaquín Pérez Navarro, did not agree with the compromises of the CNT in the opening weeks of the civil war. Pérez considered the anarchist leaders, including García Oliver and Montseny, to have been bamboozled by offers to share power with the CNT by Companys, Caballero and the Communists. He had doubts about the democratic nature of the proceedings by the CNT leaders (many of whom had been Treintistas) to legitimize the decision to join the government. This collaboration was supposed to get the CNT the arms they needed to fight the fascists but the Republicans, Socialists and Communists had no intention of arming the anarchists. When the order came down to militarize the militias, Pérez jumped aboard a truck carrying a number of anarchist militants with their weapons back to Barcelona. Many of these militants later became the Friends of Durruti, an underground organization of anarchists still committed to the social revolutionary ideals of the CNT.

In Barcelona, Pérez witnessed the steady erosion of the gains of July and August 1936, as the Communists took control of security, and reintroduced capitalism by withholding supplies from the collectives and favoring private businesses. On May 3, 1937, Communist security forces tried to seize the Barcelona telephone exchange to take it away from worker management. The Friends of Durruti, along with the anti-Stalinist POUM, joined forces and fought back. Within a day the anarchists and their POUM allies had wrested control of Barcelona from the Communists and the Catalan government. Rather than press their advantage to remove the Communists from positions of authority and get arms for the CNT military units, the leaders of the CNT, including "anarchists" Federica Montseny and Juan García Oliver, called on the anarchists to cease fire, allowing the government to flood the streets of Barcelona with troops loyal to the Communists.

These facts are well known for anyone who has read the works of Bolleten, Richards and Peirats. What *One Man's War* provides



that these other works do not is the perspective of an anarchist fighter. Contrary to what the advocates of “circumstantialism” argue, the entry of the CNT into the Republican government was seen by the anarchist fighters at the front as a betrayal. Pérez provides supporting documents to show that not only were the anarchists denied weapons needed to fight the fascists, but they were forced to fight under incompetent Communist officers, while they were hunted down in the rear areas by Communist secret police and stooges (some of whom even were allowed to join the CNT)! Pérez, himself, was arrested and thrown into the notorious prison of Montjuich and would have been executed had the Communist guards not run away to escape the advancing fascists.

## Kropotkin's Activist Anarchism

REVIEW BY IAIN MCKAY

Jim MacLaughlin, *Kropotkin and the Anarchist Intellectual Tradition*. Pluto Press, 2016.

Peter Kropotkin needs little introduction. The Russian Prince who became one of the leading anarchist thinkers of his time, his articles and books are still – rightly – recommended to those seeking to understand anarchism and have convinced many to join the movement. As such, MacLaughlin is right that Kropotkin's “teachings could be an important source of inspiration” for modern radicals. (111) If this book had been published thirty years ago it would have been welcomed – albeit with some reservations – as a useful summary of the conventional wisdom on Kropotkin in the English-speaking movement. Yet this wisdom, derived from George Woodcock's work, was questionable then and subsequent research has exposed its extremely weak foundations.

MacLaughlin, for example, repeats the commonplace – but still wrong – notion that Proudhon and Kropotkin were opposed to large-scale industry. (231) This is not true as both supported *appropriate* scales of industry. Kropotkin argued that capitalism distorted scale by its drive for profits and in many industries the current large scale was not needed for technical efficiency but rather for dominating the market. Likewise, Kropotkin was at pains to reject the idea of “the essential goodness of humans” (241), instead arguing that mutual aid and mutual struggle were both factors of evolution and so of our nature. Which predominated depended on the kind of society we built and a libertarian society needed to be vigilant against the anti-social acts of the few. This meant ensuring that, for example, everyone who can works, yet when discussing the use of social pressure to ensure this and other “social responsibilities” he suggests that “Kropotkin, like Godwin, was not immune from the temptations of self-righteousness.” (168) While there is a danger of social conformity – which Kropotkin was aware of – it is not “self-righteousness” to postulate the need for societal self-defense as basic reciprocity is implied in the expression *mutual aid*. “Tit-for-tat” is an evolutionary stable mechanism for a reason.

So we have Kropotkin “the gentle sage” (49) and are treated to Woodcock's account of his life. This means it is somewhat apologetic concerning Kropotkin's actual revolutionary class struggle politics and the labor movement, and repeats uncritically Woodcock's suggestion that as early as 1891 Kropotkin was moving to a reformist position, embracing “evolutionary change” rather than revolution and “becoming increasingly less confident in the imminence of the anarchist revolution.” (237) Given that this is based on little more than one quote from a single talk given in Leeds, it is surprising to see it repeated.

MacLaughlin proclaims that Kropotkin was both “deeply

involved with the trade union movement and workers' struggles” (89) and that there “were times, he argued, when class warfare and political violence could be considered the lesser evil.” (111) He even prefaces a quote on anarchist involvement in the labor movement from *Modern Science and Anarchism* with the suggestion that this was written “in response to those who accused him of placing too much faith in evolutionary theory and too little in revolutionary action.” (98) Yet at the time it was well known that Kropotkin had always advocated class struggle and had done so since joining the Federalist wing of the First International in the 1870s. While this is most obviously shown by the articles he wrote for *Les Temps Nouveaux* and *Freedom*, it is not absent from his more general works.

Even a quick glance through the anarchist papers for which Kropotkin wrote would show how wrong it is to suggest that he had a “penchant for scientific research and intellectual debate rather than polemics and political propaganda.” (238-9) His articles for *Les Temps Nouveaux*, for example, see him return again and again to polemics against Marxism and for what became known as a syndicalist labor movement. These are interspersed amongst articles reflecting his research on anarchism and the Great French Revolution but these too were works of political propaganda and polemic – not least, for modern revolutionaries to learn from the history of previous revolutions. Needless to say, *Mutual Aid* is not silent on class and social conflict – quite the reverse.

This reflects a major weakness of the book, namely its attempt to downplay the influence of Bakunin on both anarchism and Kropotkin's ideas. Like Woodcock, MacLaughlin seeks to portray Kropotkin as a near-pacifist, closer to Tolstoy than Bakunin. Thus we find that “compared to Bakunin and others who believed in the efficacy of anarchist-inspired acts of political violence, Kropotkin represented the reasonable face of European anarchism.” (50) Yet Bakunin did not advocate “propaganda by the deed” and both Russians advocated insurrection as well as militant working class direct action as a means to win reforms today and prepare for revolution tomorrow.

MacLaughlin is aware of this, suggesting that Kropotkin's support for the Allies in 1914 was “not inconsistent with his otherwise ambiguous views on political violence” (111), but Kropotkin was no more “ambiguous” on “political violence” than Bakunin as both were revolutionaries. The problem with Kropotkin in 1914 was that he advocated violence in defense of states and capital rather than for their destruction. As Malatesta lamented, while Bakunin in 1870 argued for a popular revolution as the basis to stop German invasion Kropotkin in 1914 eschewed this – and was praised by the jingoists accordingly, so showing how state-approved “political violence” is rarely seen for what it is.

So in spite of the obvious impact of Bakunin on Kropotkin, the former gets little mention beyond suggesting that he fits the stereotype of the violent revolutionary better than Kropotkin whom he seeks – like Woodcock before him – to sanitize. Hence the recurring contrast of Kropotkin to “small groups” of anarchists who were “determined to demonstrate their opposition to authority through political acts of violence” which some suggest “prominent” anarchists of “inspiring.” (89) Given that every political theory has produced such groups, I am at a loss to understand why it behooves some anarchists to constantly refer to it when Republicans, Marxists, nationalists, and so on rarely feel the need.

Yet while Bakunin is rarely mentioned, much space is given to William Godwin even though he had little impact on the develop-



ment of anarchism as a movement and a theory. While Proudhon's *General Idea of the Revolution* is "still ranked among anarchism's most important texts," the same cannot be said of Godwin's book (111-2) and, unsurprisingly, Kropotkin mentions him more or less in passing while concentrating on the First International. MacLaughlin also includes a discussion of someone – Gerrard Winstanley – whom Kropotkin did not mention at all, yet we are informed his writings "laid the foundations of modern anarchism." (9)

It could be argued that this follows Kropotkin, who also presents anarchism as having a long history, but a close reading of his work shows that he was well aware that modern, revolutionary, anarchism was born in the First International. Kropotkin also noted that anarchism was a product of both the class struggle and the scientific analysis of societies. In that sense, yes, anarchistic ideas have appeared before Proudhon used the word "anarchist." Yes, scientific theories are discovered independently. So it would stagger belief that no one had looked at an oppressive and exploitative society and not concluded that it could be changed and then acted accordingly. However, to draw conclusions similar to anarchism but independently of and anterior to it does not equal laying its foundations in any meaningful sense. Which means that while there can be anarchy before anarchism and, likewise, anarchistic ideas and movements can develop independently of it, this does not mean that modern anarchism was not born in the First International.

Woodcock took Kropotkin's sketching of precursors to a new level and MacLaughlin follows this. Indeed, there are passages that remind you of Woodcock's account – this is unsurprising as the book is essentially a summation of previous works on Kropotkin rather than new research. There is no attempt to look into the many newspapers Kropotkin was associated with during his life as an anarchist thinker and activist. Instead, we have accounts of the most accessible – and so most general – of Kropotkin's voluminous output. This cannot help skewing how Kropotkin is viewed.

This perspective can be seen from comments like Kropotkin having "embarked on the lonely path of the international anarchist theorist." (89) Sadly, MacLaughlin does not square this comment with how popular Kropotkin actually was in anarchist and radical circles, as shown by the regular visits to his home by those seeking his advice and invites to speak at public events. This reflects the image of a "gentle sage" struggling with his revolutionary politics and at odds with a wider, revolutionary, movement fostered by Woodcock. Nor does it square with the (untrue) claim that "[b]y the time Bakunin died in 1876, Kropotkin was already revered as a prominent leftist intellectual in Europe's leading radical circles." (88) His fame came much later – indeed, until the 1890s his articles went unsigned for he was one activist amongst many contributing to the anarchist press.

Yet even in terms of summarizing the conventional (Woodcockian) wisdom of 1986 there are issues with the work. There is much quoting of Kropotkin – which is good – but his clear prose is in marked contrast to the often jargon-ridden comments surrounding them. Kropotkin deliberately wrote in a manner which any worker could understand – both in his anarchist writings and in his scientific writings. The same cannot be said of MacLaughlin. The contrast between Kropotkin's style and the modern-day "activist" or "academic" writing with its unneeded and unnecessary terminology is all too obvious. Take this passage as an example: the Communards had managed to articulate a discordant decentralised vision of urban life that was radically opposed to compartmentalisation of urban space and the hierarchical

control of urban life in Paris. (229)

Why was it "discordant"? Is that good or bad? Presumably it is good, but I am at a loss to understand why. Likewise, I've read many – but not all – Communard proclamations and writings and I am not sure what the "compartmentalisation of urban space" is meant to mean in this context. These words have presumably been used for a reason, but *why* is hard to fathom – beyond sounding impressive and deep.

It also means those of us outside of certain academic and activist circles cannot help feeling we are being dropped into a conversation without context or subtitles (so to speak). This is not limited to MacLaughlin's work – it sadly marks much of modern political writing, as can be seen from Ruth Kinna's recent book on Kropotkin. Sadly, unlike Kinna's book which is redeemed by new research on Kropotkin's ideas, MacLaughlin more or less just repeats what Woodcock and others have written. Surprisingly, the book makes no mention of Caroline Cahm's *Peter Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism* (1989), which is still the best account of his ideas, nor Daniel Todes' important work on the Russian engagement with Darwin, *Darwin without Malthus* (1989), which places Kropotkin's work in its intellectual and social context.

While the aim of this book cannot be faulted, sadly it fails to live up to its promise. Overall, it is an adequate – if dated – introduction to Kropotkin which reflects the perspective of its main influences – Woodcock above all. In terms of readability and wider engagement with the issues Kropotkin raises, Brian Morris' book *Kropotkin: The Politics of Community* (2004) is far better.

## This Fight is Our Fight? Saving America's Middle Class

REVIEW BY WAYNE PRICE

Elizabeth Warren, *This Fight is Our Fight: The Battle to Save America's Middle Class*. Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2017.

Elizabeth Warren is a key leader of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, along with Bernie Sanders (who is still technically an independent). Her integrity and passion are well known, as expressed in her fights with big business and with its Republican and (sometimes) Democratic servants. Written after the election of Donald Trump, this book is her latest cry from the heart.

It includes vivid accounts of ordinary working people who are unable to make ends meet, who cannot rise out of poverty to a stable "middle class" standard of living, as such people had been able to do in the '50s and '60s. And Warren describes the operations of big business, its concentration into huge semi-monopolies in field after field. "Giant corporations now dominate much of our lives.... The impact of consolidation is everywhere." (88) These giant quasi-monopolies dominate government, including the regulatory agencies set up to limit them. Her descriptions of workers and of the corporate rich and their agents are informative and worth reading.

She is worried. If things continue as they are, "We will become an oligarchy, a nation in which the powerful few make sure that the government runs to serve their interests.... The rich and powerful have a well-stocked armory for seizing control of our democracy and... they are already using it very effectively." (209) (She does not think that this has already happened.) She worries that an economic crisis like 2008 may recur. "The risk is still there.... The big banks are not significantly safer than they were just before the crash... in fact, they may be even riskier." (94-95) And she is



worried, as we all should be, about the dangers of global warming and climate catastrophe.

Unlike Bernie Sanders, Warren does not claim to be a “democratic socialist” or anything but a pro-capitalist “progressive.” “I’m a deeply pro-market person.... I believe that competition delivers great value for American consumers....” (149) But unlike conservatives, she does not trust the capitalist market to automatically produce stable prosperity and good jobs. For that to happen, she believes, it is necessary for the state to intervene heavily in the economy. (If she were in Western Europe, she would be regarded these days as a social democrat.)

**This is her program:** Increasing regulatory agencies to oversee the major parts of the economy, especially the financial sector. Otherwise, she thinks, big business will not compete but will collude and merge, meanwhile cheating its customers, workers and investors. Besides more regulation, she advocates increased taxes on the rich and the corporations to equalize the income spread. The money from these taxes would be used for vastly increased government spending – on infrastructure, education, healthcare, research, etc. She mentions other ideas, such as breaking up the giant banks into smaller ones. She supports unions and wants the government to make it easier for them to function. Except perhaps for the reference to the unions, this is all a program for increased state intervention in the marketplace, to be achieved by electing progressive Democrats (and the unions are praised for their support to the Democratic Party). Without massive state control, she really does not believe that the capitalist market would work (not just be fair, but avoid another collapse).

This sort of program is popular on the left today, from moderate progressives to reformist democratic socialists. It has its virtues (it would be good to have more spending for education, research and healthcare), but it is entirely inadequate to deal with the current situation of long term capitalist stagnation and looming ecological catastrophe. Capitalism has a drive towards increased centralization and monopolization. Despite Warren’s subjective belief in democracy, her program would result in a capitalist market of giant businesses dominated by – and interacting with – a powerful state. This does not promise increased freedom or better living.

### How Did This Happen?

How did things get so bad? Warren gives her version of economic history: During the Great Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal came to the rescue by setting up government oversight of the economy. Regulations were passed and regulatory agencies created, to act as the “cop on the beat,” making sure that businesses would play by the rules. This was combined with making the rich pay their fair share of taxes and using the money to pay for needed social services, while defending the rights of unions.

As a result, Warren claims, prosperity returned (around 1935) and lasted to the 1970s. But then big business began a counter-offensive to roll back the gains of the New Deal. With a high point under Ronald Reagan, the government was captured and used to weaken regulations and their agencies, cut taxes on the rich, slash social spending, and attack the unions. And so here we are today, with Trump’s administration continuing these retrogressive policies, on steroids.

While superficially correct, this version of history misses the real story (see Price 2012). The Great Depression was part of the long-term decline of capitalism, beginning around 1900, including two world wars. This was due to the growth of monopoly and the decline in the rate of profit. The Great Depression did not end in

1935 (its middle) but lasted until 1939 or so (when about 20% of the labor force was still unemployed). What ended it was not Roosevelt’s regulations but the massive spending for World War II. What kept it from coming back after the war was continuing arms spending, the reorganization of the world imperialist system (now centered around the United States), and the looting of the environment (especially basing the economy on “cheap” petroleum).

These factors provided an extended period of prosperity (mostly for white people in the industrialized-imperialist countries). It became possible for business unions to win decent pay for many workers and for the government to provide a range of services. The major corporations made huge profits and (under pressure) could afford to recognize unions and accept a level of “middle class” living standards for much of the working class.

However, the forces promoting relative prosperity ran out of steam around the early 1970s. The capitalist economy has been going downhill since then (with ups and downs, and bursts of apparent profits which were mostly bubbles of paper gains). The United States capitalists, in particular, have been losing their pre-eminent place as top dog in the world system, which means decreased profits. Ecological and energy issues became ever more problematic. It was in order to deal with these problems that the capitalists began their offensive against the benefits provided by the New Deal. They began to dismantle the regulations, to crush the unions, to send industry overseas where workers can be paid less, and to drive down the living standards of U.S. workers.

The implications of this analysis are dire. Regulations or no regulations, the U.S. capitalist class cannot afford to return to the days of prosperity that followed the World War – at least without going through another world war, which would be calamitous. Attempts to revive serious regulation or greater (nonmilitary) public spending will be fought tooth and nail by the capitalists and their bought-and-paid-for politicians. The history of “Obamacare” is an example. Facing an extremely important issue – the health care crisis – the Democrats passed a program by the skin of their teeth, a program which was barely better than nothing, with major subsidies to the insurance and drug industries. The Republicans have been bitterly fighting it ever since, and may destroy it despite the popularity of many of its benefits.

Elizabeth Warren does not understand that the prosperity of the capitalist class is based on what it takes from the working class. Indeed, she never uses the term “working class,” only “middle class.” To speak of a “middle class” is to assume a split between the better-off section of the working class and the poorer section. She describes how members of the working poor try to get into the “middle class,” that is, to get better jobs and pay so they can buy houses and cars and send their children to college. But workers who get better jobs are not “leaving” one class (the poor) and rising into another (the “middle class”). They are still working for wages, taking orders from bosses (capitalists or their hired managers), and getting paid less than the full value of what they produce (whether goods or services). This is even true of “white collar” workers (such as teachers or airplane pilots). They are part of the working class.

The more the working class gets, the less there is for the capitalists’ profits – and vice versa. This was hidden during the prosperity after World War II by various mechanisms. Increased productivity made commodities cheaper (so that the workers could get more products without actually getting a larger share of what they produced overall). Many costs were simply ignored (such as the ecological costs of oil production and its effects on the climate).



Today these costs are coming due. The symptoms of the epoch of capitalist decline are once again obvious for all to see – except perhaps for liberals, progressives and reform socialists.

The capitalist turn to attack the regulations and benefits from the New Deal were not just carried out by the Republicans. Warren focuses on the Republicans as the enemy, which bolsters her support of the Democrats. But occasionally she admits that the Democrats were also involved in the rightward turn of big business. “When Reagan ushered in trickle-down economics [the claim that cutting taxes for the rich would benefit everyone below them – WP] in the 1980s, some Democrats resisted, but many others helped push forward his tax cuts and deregulation. Bill Clinton, for example, presided over the repeal of Glass-Steagall [a major regulation of the banks – WP], and Obama flirted with a ‘grand bargain’ that would cut Social Security benefits.” (214) But the Republicans would not make a deal with him.

Writing of the political influence of Citigroup, the giant bank, under the Democrats,

Three of the last four Treasury secretaries under Democratic presidents had close Citigroup ties. The fourth was offered the CEO position at Citigroup.... Both the vice chair of the Federal Reserve System and the undersecretary for international affairs at Treasury were former Citigroup executives. The U.S. trade representative and the person nominated for his deputy were Citigroup alums.... A recent chairman of the National Economic Council at the White House was a Citigroup exec, and a recent chairman of the Office of Management and Budget went to Citigroup immediately after leaving the White House. And that counts only the guys at the tippy top. (177-178)

However, the Republicans are more likely to get their government people from Goldman-Sachs.

The Republicans are the cutting edge of the attack on working people. But the Democrats are also part of the knife. As the Republicans have moved to the far-right, the Democrats have moved to the center-right, about where the Republicans used to be. (For example, “Obamacare” was based on a Republican healthcare program promoted by Mitt Romney when he was governor in Massachusetts – in opposition to proposed liberal programs such as single payer.) During the Democratic primary in 2016, Sanders repeatedly pointed to Hillary Clinton’s ties to big business. It was well-known that she was an establishment politician and that she and Bill had gotten rich “serving the public.” (Clinton’s main appeal was that she was not Trump.)

Warren, Sanders and a very few other politicians are on the left end of the Democrats. Like Jesse Jackson or Eugene McCarthy in the past, they serve to attract dissatisfied people into a party which serves a wing of the capitalist class. Certainly Warren is sincere and well-meaning, but the result of her actual program is that she betrays the interests of working people.

## War and Imperialism

The post-World War II boom had a lot to do with the placement of the U.S. capitalist class and its state at the center of the world economy, so it drained wealth from all the world (i.e., it was imperialist). And the decline in the U.S. today has a lot to do with the decline of the U.S. rulers’ position in the world. Yet, in the whole book, Warren says little to nothing about foreign relations. The U.S. is involved in wars around the world, including the longest war in its history (Afghanistan), while facing possible armed conflicts with Russia, China and/or North Korea – but

she says nothing about this. She writes about the need for higher taxes on the wealthy to pay for social benefits, but does not raise the liberal demand for deep cuts in military spending to provide funds for social needs.

Rather than discussing U.S. imperialism, Warren writes that improving U.S. education and infrastructure are important because “we are already competing on a global scale... We’re all uncertain about who the winners in the future will be.... Of our competitors: China... will have a better chance to be winners in the global economy.” (130) So she wants U.S. businesses and workers to compete with Chinese (and other) businesses and workers, and to beat them in global competition. She is completely identifying with U.S. capitalists, wanting them to win in their contest with the Chinese and other capitalists, claiming that this would be good for U.S. workers.

She does note that many trade deals are negotiated solely by those with commitments to big business (not labor, environmentalists or small businesses) and that the resulting agreements are usually unfair to working people. So she wants better trade negotiations. But she does not see that the globalized international capitalists have common interests in maintaining their rule over the working people of the world (even if the giant firms compete with each other and use their governments to militarily “defend” their interests). She certainly does not see working and oppressed people around the world as having common interests in ending international competition, exploitation, national oppression and wars – or in industrializing the whole world in an ecologically sustainable way.

## The Battle to Save the Working Class

There are other aspects of this book which will not be raised. Her main discussion of racial and other forms of discrimination is from a speech given to businessmen (yes, all white men) about why such discrimination is bad for business. (No comment.) There are some lively parts where she describes her conflicts with regulators, businesspeople and politicians, as well as moving passages where she describes her interactions with ordinary working families. My complaint is not with her heart but her head – that is, with her program. It is simply inadequate nor is it attractive to those who want a freer, more creative, and human society.

What Elizabeth Warren describes as a “battle to save America’s middle class” is mainly a battle to save the Democratic Party’s electoral fortunes. As a party, it is thoroughly enmeshed with the capitalist class and its system. Warren herself is a supporter of capitalism and thinks that it can be made to work, if only better regulations were put in place. But the government itself – the state – is an agent of exploitation and oppression. It cannot be used against the capitalist system, not even to make capitalism fairer to the exploited and oppressed, or avoid looming catastrophe.

Despite her passing references to unions, what she never considers is the potential power of working people as working people. With our hands on the means of production, transportation, communication and services, we can shut down the system, if we chose – or start it up again in a different way. Faced with the evils of Trump and the Republicans, and the Democrats, and the corporate rich, and the whole of their class, and the power of their state, it is this which can win the battle to save the working class and all the oppressed. That fight is indeed our fight.

**Reference:** Wayne Price (2012), “Living Through the Decline of Capitalism.” [www.anarkismo.net/article/24227?search\\_text=Wayne+Price](http://www.anarkismo.net/article/24227?search_text=Wayne+Price)

*The Republicans are the cutting edge of the attack on working people, but the Democrats are also part of the knife...*



# Transnational Anarchism

REVIEW BY MARTIN COMACK

Constance Bantman and Bert Altena, editors, **Reassessing the Transnational Turn: Scales of Analysis in Anarchist and Syndicalist Studies**. PM Press, 2017. 256 pp., \$24.95, paper.

Despite its somewhat obscure title, the essays in this volume shed much light on the development of anarchism as an international movement, focusing on what one contributor calls the heyday of anarchism – the half century preceding the First World War.

In theory the anarchist concept of traditional nationalism is clear and well-defined – i.e., the nation-state is a social construct and nationalism is a device of the ruling class to cloud class consciousness and encourage ideas of racial and ethnic superiority toward other peoples and nations – emotions particularly useful in times of international conflict and war. But as these essays illustrate, in practice anarchists have exhibited a variety of often ambiguous or contradictory attitudes toward the nation if not the state, usually attempting to make a separation between the two, between a community of shared culture and language and a political authority that sometimes relies upon coercion to enforce obedience and loyalty.

In his discussion of national identity, Davide Turcato quotes the German anarchist Gustav Landauer to the effect that as a German, as a South German and as a Jew, he belonged to three nations at the same time. (Landauer was eventually murdered by Freikorps troops whose conception of nationalism was much narrower). Turcato notes that when the ideology of nationalism made its first appearance in the wake of the French Revolution it was conceived of as a universal movement dedicated to the overthrow of feudal tyranny and the achievement of liberty and self-determination for all peoples. This changed over the course of the nineteenth century. Most nationalisms evolved into much more exclusive, statist and reactionary ideologies.

But the distinction between state and nation is often blurred, resistance to national or ethnic oppression can overlap with class consciousness and assertions of international proletarian solidarity. There are the examples of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine, James Connolly in Ireland, Emiliano Zapata in Mexico – internationally celebrated as social revolutionaries, they are regarded as part of the worldwide wave of radicalism of the early twentieth century. But along with that they are all also considered national heroes in their respective nations, their names and images represented on statues, plaques, postage stamps and tee shirts.

Constance Bantman's essay examines the influences of national feeling and patriotism upon the French anarchist movement in the Belle Epoque. Heirs of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, the French anarchists and syndicalists often mixed their internationalist ideology with national themes, sometimes including a crude anti-Semitism. The fallout from the Dreyfus case stimulated the growth of an ultra-nationalist right wing in the Third Republic that affected those on the left as well.

Along these lines both Bantman and Ruth Kinna consider the paradox of Peter Kropotkin's support for the Allied cause in the Great War, which scandalized most of his fellow anarchists and revealed a gap between libertarian theory and practice. Prussian militarism, he insisted, was worse than Russian Czarism, which he correctly assumed was ripe for collapse under the pressure of war. Taking a strategic view, Kropotkin also saw in an Allied triumph the final doom of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires and the end of autocracy in Europe. (And so it was, only to be followed by something worse). Nevertheless, Kropotkin, with the support

of some anarchists, was certain that a French victory would inspire all Europe with the great principles of "freedom, communism and brotherhood." (182)

But not according to the radical historian Max Nettlau, who accused Kropotkin of being motivated by Slavic nationalism and hostility to Germany – as had been the theorist and activist Michael Bakunin before him. Bert Altena outlines the career of the man he calls "the Herodotus of anarchism" (62), a figure relatively little known today, but the author of a voluminous history of international anarchism from ancient days through the early years of the twentieth century. Nettlau considered anarchism to be transnational by nature and modern heir to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Enlightenment, but rejected all theories of historical development – especially Marxism in which he claimed to detect totalitarian elements. He considered anarcho-syndicalism too nationally oriented. Nevertheless, in apparent contradiction to his cosmopolitanism, Nettlau, Austrian by birth, denounced the Versailles Treaty and hoped for a cultural resurrection of German-speaking Europe in opposition to the reactionary Slavic peoples.

Nino Kuhn's considers the influence of national feeling and local patriotism among the home-grown anarchists of Switzerland. In their bi-lingual publications the libertarians often referred to the early Swiss resistance to Austrian encroachment and claimed traditional national values to be the basis of their anarchist ideals. The Swiss hero William Tell was called "the anarchist from Uri" for his never-ending fight for freedom and liberty. "We are Swiss," one anarchist sheet declared, "to feel the glowing red flush our faces at the thought of our fatherland, which lies at the feet of European reaction." (164)

Raymond Craib's essay "Sedentary Anarchists" presents an example of what might be termed radical particularism, a strong attachment to place, to locality. By de-emphasizing the nation-state as the framework for historical inquiry, the transnational "turn" has allowed the local community and the neighborhood to emerge as objects of study. While acknowledging the global connections and bonds of international solidarity, Craib has focused upon the local activities of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists in Santiago, Chile, in the first decades of the twentieth century, and most especially in the Barrio Latino, near the center of the city. He provides a map of the area detailing the residences of militants, work places, union halls and venues for radical meetings and social events. Craib considers the activism of one of the Barrio locals, originally a young Spanish immigrant to Chile, one Casimiro Barrios, who became a permanent resident of the capital city and a constant irritant to bosses, judges, landlords and the police. Barrios saw no difficulty in combining the demand for immediate reforms with revolutionary aims. He knew "the labor laws, his neighbors and their employers, local organizers and beat cops... Santiago and its neighborhoods." Craib observes that "Insurrections and protests depend on careful, patient, extensive organizing carried on by individuals in the place in question... peripatetic radicals make good press, but it was the sedentary ones whom industrialists and employers feared most. And for every Errico Malatesta, there were a hundred, if not more, Casimiro Barrios." (148)

Malatesta, of course, was the embodiment of the international revolutionary, one of the most prominent anarchists of his time. He was part of what has been called the Italian anarchist diaspora. Isabelle Felice and Pietro Di Paola relate the transnational effects of anarchist immigration, particularly that of the ubiquitous Italians who were able to carry their radical message across seas



and continents from Alexandria, Egypt, through the great cities of Europe, to Argentina, Brazil and North America. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century around ten thousand Italian immigrants had settled in the textile center of Paterson, New Jersey, some 1,000 of them subscribers to the anarchist journal *La Questione Sociale*.

Kenyon Zimmer notes the influx of militants on America's Pacific coast and describes the heretofore little known radical scene of those years in San Francisco – center of what he calls “A Golden Gate of Anarchy” – probably the most ethnically mixed group of anarchists to be found anywhere on the globe. Here in the Bay Area flourished “more than 20 anarchist periodicals in eight different languages” and a variety of clubs and affinity groups that included Russians, Jews, French, Italians, Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Spaniards, Mexicans, Poles, Yugoslavs, Germans, English, Irish and native-born – “a uniquely diverse community of anarchists with dense ties to revolutionary movements throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.” (100)

Ethnicity and race became major themes among anarchist writers and journalists in the debacle of the Spanish Civil War. The anarcho-syndicalists reluctantly aligned themselves with the Loyalist government at the beginning of the struggle against General Franco, only to have their attempts at social revolution repressed by the Stalinists who came to dominate the Republican state. Martin Baxmeyer illustrates the initial attempts of anarchist writers and journalists to reconcile their revolutionary ideology with the nationalist and patriotic propaganda of the Republican regime. This was particularly relevant with regard to the presence of North African Moors in the fascist army. Encouraged by Franco's officers, the Moors left a trail of unrelieved atrocities across conquered Republican territory – rape, murder and pillage. Historical memory of the Reconquista, the expulsion of the Muslims from Iberia in the fifteenth century, became a major theme in the Republican media and press. The Moors were reviled as a plague, a virus threatening the Spanish race. Anarchist writers joined in, lamenting the defilement of “Mother Spain” by dark-skinned savages with illusions to “Black, negroid rape” (200) and the “black dreams of the Kabilian kaffirs.” (201)

The essays presented here reveal the international and transnational nature of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism and their presence in social movements around the globe – an influence much greater than bourgeois or Marxist historians of the modern era have given them credit for. But these writings also convey the considerable difficulties anarchists faced when confronted by the realities of ethnic pride, race consciousness and patriotic feeling in a world divided into warring nation-states. Pure ideology was often abandoned or adapted, and individual prejudice sometimes aroused. Imperfect, like their fellow human beings, the anarchists and syndicalists of that era were not saints. This collection is an honest assessment of their successes and failures in attempting to live out their ideals.

## Economics of Labor Repression

REVIEW BY JON BEKKEN

Andrew Kolin, *Political Economy of Labor Repression in the United States*. Lexington Books, 2017, 399 pages.

Kolin takes a long view of labor repression in this tome, beginning with the varieties of unfree labor present at the American Revolution (a conflict between local and British elites over who would plunder the continent), to present-day labor arrangements in which anti-labor laws, contingent labor and surveillance make

it difficult if not impossible to organize unions and fight for better conditions. He stresses the mutually reinforcing role of economic and state power in controlling labor, attributing the growth of a powerful, centralized state both to elites' desire to expand their sphere of dominance and to their need to control labor unrest.

Labor struggles were undermined by “organized labor's belief that there was no alternative to forming alliances with capital.” (xv) Until German socialists joined the U.S. labor movement, Kolin says, workers passively accepted their subordination. This is a fundamentally ideological argument – he recognizes that there were strikes, rebellions, slave revolts, cooperative movements, labor parties and the like, but insists they lacked a formal commitment to working-class control. Indeed, the mainstream of American labor (and this is true even of allegedly radical-led unions) embraced labor-management cooperation, repression of ethnic or other outsiders, discrimination, and a high (but not unlimited) degree of workplace autocracy. But there have always been workers who recognized the fundamental injustice of capitalism and fought against it.

While all-out repression was directed against radical labor movements, the capitalists and their state have been more willing to cut deals with business unionists – particularly when union membership was high enough to pose a potential threat. Kolin criticizes the decision of officials in the AFL and CIO to embrace anti-communism and suppress radicalism within their own ranks (suppression of dissident voices had a long history in the business unions, including those controlled by so-called communists, and had far more to do with preserving power and controlling union funds than with ideology). This discussion ignores the sordid history of Marxists within the unions and their embrace of speed-ups, union scabbing, and the like in deference to their political agendas, a history that led many rank-and-file unionists to embrace the purges.

The writing is fairly turgid (“While organized labor, due to institutional exclusion, out of necessity had to collaborate with capital, the underlying contrary class interests between capital and labor remain” 343), but Kolin has read widely and points to the many ways in which economics and law serve as weapons to preserve the rule of the few. But his focus is on official state action – the long history of violence carried out by employers' gun thugs, vigilantes, rampaging police and militia is addressed only in passing. There is but a sentence each on the Everett and Memorial Day massacres, and nothing at all on Ludlow.

In his conclusion, Kolin seeks a way for workers to escape our subjugation: to recognize that the bosses' interests are incompatible with our needs, develop a strategy for transforming society in the interests of the vast majority, and organize. But with unions in disarray, and labor parties off the table, how are we to move forward? Kolin looks to expand worker cooperatives (“pockets of worker-based democracy” 344), negotiate union contracts that protect the right to strike and reduce working hours, and fight for economic democracy by nationalizing the banks and other financial institutions, buying factories abandoned by the capitalists, and other measures to create a worker-owned economy. When workers own industry, we will be in a position to put an end to labor repression.

This is completely utopian. There is not the slightest prospect of the government nationalizing the banks (even with the lifetime annuities he proposes to cushion the blow to the exploiters) and using these assets to finance worker buy-outs of the capitalists. Faced with successful worker enterprises, he suggests, “Capital would have a hard time justifying repression.” (361) But the difficulty of justifying their savage repression has never much concerned the



employing class, who are deeply committed to preserving their power. In the process we could restore a genuine political process, freed of the distorting effects of coercion (the author is a political scientist). And he ends up with something very much like Parecon.

If we want to institute economic democracy, we will have to accomplish this through our own organization, and through direct action at the point of production, not with hopeless appeals to the politicians to act in the interests of the working-class majority.

## Radical Press Review

REVIEW BY MIKE HARGIS

Like all print media, anarchist print media are few and far between – so when I get my hands of a print publication it is a treat. I'm old-fashioned that way. I can read stuff on-line, but it is just not the same. So here are some radical publications I've seen lately.

**Industrial Worker** – The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism (PO Box 180195, Chicago IL 60618) vol. 114 # 3/WN 1780. Summer 2017. \$16/year for IWW members, \$20/year for others. \$28 international.

The Official Periodical of the Industrial Workers of the World has been cut back to a quarterly magazine. This issue includes an open letter from Railroad Workers United remembering the deadly rail crash in 2014 at Lac-Mégantic in Quebec, protesting the lack of any progress in implementing of better safety regulations and the prosecution of two rail workers: Tom Harding and Richard Labrie.

Also in this issue is a report on the IWW's Western Regional Organizing Assembly; testimony by a fellow worker on why he joined the General Defense Committee; an article advocating community organizing instead of workplace organizing; a historical spread on the Bisbee Deportation; and a couple of reprints from other sources on anti-farmworker legislation in North Carolina and pay-equity fights for women athletes.

There's also what is apparently a factional piece, "Revolutionary Unionism or White Workerism: The Choice Facing the IWW" by Brandon S. and Natalia R. In it the authors advocate that IWW put more emphasis on "anti-oppression" organizing, particularly through the General Defense Committee, and less on the workplace, which they deride as economism, and what they call "white workerism," a blatant attempt to race-bait their factional opponents.

At least the new editor brought back the Preamble to the Constitution, but printed it on the back page, which makes it look more like an afterthought rather than the leading idea of the IWW.

**The Match! A Journal of Ethical Anarchism.** Issue No. 116, Summer 2017. PO Box 3012, Tucson AZ 85702. Subscription Free but \$10 cash donation is encouraged.

Editor Fred Woodworth has been putting out *The Match!* since 1969. For many years it was a monthly publication. (It was, in fact, the first explicitly anarchist publication I ever subscribed to.) For several years now it is an annual, totally self-produced by Woodworth. In this issue's editorial Woodworth reveals that he is contemplating abandoning the anarchist label since he does not recognize as anarchistic most of what passes for anarchism today: black bloc tactics, property destruction, violent confrontation with neo-nazis; etc. In my favorite regular column, Who the Police Beat, there is lamentation that more and more the clippings are no longer about simple police brutality but about police murder.

Other regular columns include Around & About; Evil Empire Notes; Crap Detection Department; History Corner, a reprint of a *Match* article on police helicopters from 1972; book, film and 'zine

reviews; and The World's Largest Letters Column (20 pages worth). This issue also includes an insert, "A Few Suggestions Concerning Police," a list of 13 restrictions that should be put on the police to make them less harmful: no military style weaponry, end SWAT-type raids on homes, a limit of 5 years of service, reduce salaries of cops, prohibit police unions, prohibit police or their relatives from acting politically as police, etc. I may not always agree with I read here, but it makes you think.

**Fifth Estate.** Vol 52, #1, WN 398, Summer 2017. PO Box 201016, Ferndale MI 48220, FifthEstate.org. \$15 for 4 issues in the US, \$22 Mexico, \$65 elsewhere.

One of the oldest continuing radical publications (since 1965), *Fifth Estate* is now a quarterly magazine. It seems to have moved away, somewhat, from the neo-primitivist/anti-civilization stance of a few years ago and in the direction of a more "mainstream" anarchist discourse. The theme of this Summer 2017 issue is "Revolutions, Revolts, Riots & Rebellions" and features articles on the unfinished Russian Revolution (100 years old this year), the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, the struggle to save the Can Vies Squat in Barcelona. Also in this issue are several articles dealing with the Trump phenomenon and its meaning for the future of revolution; an article appealing for support for the Cleveland 4, Occupy activists entrapped by the police in a plot to blow up a bridge in 2012; an article on Republican attacks of Social Security and possible anarchist alternatives to state-sponsored social insurance programs; a fiction piece; and book, film and periodical reviews. Overall, pretty sensible ideas presented in this issue.

**Organise! ...for revolutionary anarchism.** Publication of the Anarchist Federation. c/o Freedom Bookshop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, England. <https://afed.org.uk/publications/organise/>. #88 Summer 2017

Journal of the Anarchist Federation, British Section of the International of Anarchist Federation, the summer 2017 issue has a theme of "Smash the Prison Industrial Complex" containing articles advocating for the abolition of prisons and how to get involved in the movement. There are also articles dealing with repression of anarchists in Turkey; a Cuban anarchist response to the death of Fidel Castro and what it means for the future of the Cuban revolution; a nod to the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution with a reprint of "The Two Octobers" by Pyotr Arshinov; and, of course, book reviews. One article that caught my attention was in their Culture Feature column, on "Beer in a Bad State," about the history of beer and state and capital's attempt to regulate it through taxation, rules governing alcoholic content and other ingredients, etc.

**Slingshot,** Issue #124, Summer 2017. A publication of Long Haul Infoshop, 3124 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley CA 94705, Mail: PO Box 3051, Berkeley CA 94703, Free. "Independent radical newspaper published since 1988."

*Slingshot*, a well-established institution of the Berkeley radical community, looks like a throwback to the days of the underground press (lots of graphics, hand-lettered headlines, etc.). And it is printed on newsprint! While I like illustrations as much as the next guy (and I love newsprint), I think they overdo it and it can get in the way of the message. (This aesthetic criticism might just be a function of the fact that I am now a geezer. Back when I was twenty-something I would have really dug it, but now...meh.) Under the design are some interesting articles. The lead article, "The Feeblest Head of the Hydra: Oil Spills = Occupation," proposes that the struggle against oil pipelines, both the construction



of new ones and shutting down existing ones, can be the cutting edge of the fight against capitalist destruction of the planet and the foundation of last communities of struggle.

There's also the continuing saga of the fight to preserve People's Park as a free community space against attempts of the city to "develop" the land; articles on how to deal with mental health issues in the radical community; book and zine reviews; a directory of local radical spaces and a calendar of upcoming events.

**Anathema.** A Philadelphia Anarchist Periodical. Vol III, # IV, May/June 2017. Free, [anathema.noblogs.org](http://anathema.noblogs.org), [anathema@riseup.net](mailto:anathema@riseup.net).

Local newsletter of a definitely "insurrectionist" bent. This issue contains an anarchist response to gentrification (riot); solidarity with anarchist prisoners; an excerpt from a report on the May Day riot in Olympia; speculation on the use of explosives (illustrated with a graphic on how to construct a molotov cocktail); an anti-science response to the Science March; and an article on something called "Black Anarchism," which is basically defined by violence, individualism, illegalism and informal organization. While I found it interesting to learn what these comrades have on their minds I can't say that I support their brand.

**Rebel Worker.** Paper of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Network. Vol 34, #s 1 (225) Mar-Apr 2016, 2 July-Aug 2016 and 3 (227) Nov-Dec 2016. PO Box 92, Broadway, NSW 2007. \$.50 (Aus.) per copy. \$12 (Aus.) per year in Australia, \$20 (Aus.) via land, \$25 (Aus.) by air.

These guys send me a whole year's worth of their publication once a year so I've got last year's issues.

Very heavy on Australian labor news, in particular the transport sector where ASN appears to have some industrial concentration, but also include international coverage. They also include historical pieces, book reviews, etc. They often will engage in polemics against what they consider leftist counter-cultural deviations from orthodox anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice in the anarchist milieu. *Rebel Worker* is very much an agitational publication with most articles published with the hope of sparking their readers to action.

Also included in the package is *Sparks*, their "rank and file transport workers paper," a pamphlet-sized publication dedicated to agitation and shop floor news of the transport sector in New South Wales. Includes news from bus and rail depots around NSW but also includes some news of workers' struggles in other countries.

## LETTERS

In *The Cancer Ward* Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in addition to describing his own experience with cancer, uses cancer as metaphor for Stalinism. *The Cancer Ward* takes place between Stalin's death and Khrushchev's secret 1956 speech denouncing Stalin. It didn't remain secret for long. Just as cancer can return, so can Stalinism. It returned with Vladimir Putin.

The current state of the American-Russian relationship including Ukraine, Syria and the crisis over North Korean nuclear tests and missile firings, shows that the cold war is not over. If the cold war is not over, then Ronald Reagan did not "win the cold war," as was the repeated bogus claim by Republican ideologues and even by some liberal commentators.

— Raymond S. Solomon

### Resisting High Executive Pay

The ASR #70 Editorial, "Wanted: More Social Misery," highlighted the CEO-to-worker pay ratio. I want to introduce a small step to resist high executive pay through shareholder proposals.

I have submitted proposals to several companies to reform their executive compensation policy. For example I submitted a proposal to Apple's 2015 shareholders meeting: "The proposal ... called for Apple to reform its compensation committee to include outside independent experts ... responsive to America's general economy, such as unemployment, working hours and wage inequality. Zhao ... cited articles suggesting that wage inequality was one of the sources of financial instability in the U.S. He noted that Apple's chief financial officer was paid \$68.5 million in 2012 ... and its retail and online stores senior vice president was paid \$73.3 million in 2014. Zhao requested that these pay levels and his proposal be evaluated in the context of Apple's overall compensation policy, including the pay and working conditions for supply-chain workers in China, where most of Apple's products are made." This proposal was excluded from consideration by Apple.

In 2016 I submitted a similar proposal to Apple's 2017 shareholders meeting.<sup>2</sup> This time, the Securities and Exchange Commission sided with me, which was widely reported. For example:

"Apple investor Jing Zhao proposed a shareholder vote on whether the company should hire outside consultants to review executive pay. Though Apple tried to exclude the proposal, the SEC ruled in favor of Zhao. According to Zhao, as cited by *Fortune*, this is not just about Apple: 'There is absolutely no doubt that the increase of inequality in the United States contributed to the nation's financial instability... Because it is objectively difficult to measure individual contributions to a firm's output, top managers found it relatively easy to persuade boards and stockholders that they were worth the money, especially since the members of compensation committees were often chosen in a rather incestuous manner.'"<sup>3</sup>

"The proposal was submitted by activist gadfly Jing Zhao who ... notes that the same salary, annual incentive and long-term incentive was awarded to five of six executives and calls into question the usefulness of the compensation committee if "it could not differentiate the contribution of the tremendously different functions"... Zhao also cites economist Thomas Piketty and income inequality as reasons for the proposal's importance."<sup>4</sup>

"Shareholder Jing Zhao declared to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission on June 13 that Apple lacked "fair, just and ethical compensation principles" ... Zhao quotes from Thomas Piketty's controversial "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" analysis and claims that compensation packages like Apple's, and other companies like it, have led to "rising inequality" ... *Publications by Zhao's group include "Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist" ... and the "Chinese Anarchist Archives."* ... The same individual requested Google form a wide-reaching "human rights" committee ... in 2010, and filed the same request ... with Goldman Sachs in 2013."<sup>5</sup>

Although these proposals have not received majority support, they nonetheless delivered a strong voice resisting the non-stop raise of executive high pay. I call this strategy "Archimedes' Lever": with 1% of one million shares, we can mobilize several percents and educate almost 100% of shareholders (even if against it) and the general public on this important social policy. — *Jing Zhao*  
1. <http://jimhamiltonblog.blogspot.com/2015/11/proposals-on-gender-pay-gap.html>. 2. [http://cpri.tripod.com/cpr2016/apple\\_proposal\\_2017.pdf](http://cpri.tripod.com/cpr2016/apple_proposal_2017.pdf). 3. [www.equilar.com/blogs/179-ceo-personality-and-performance.html](http://www.equilar.com/blogs/179-ceo-personality-and-performance.html). 4. [www.exccomp.org/News/NewsStories/sec-rules-apple-must-allow-shareholder-vote-on-executive-pay-review-similar-proposals-more-likely](http://www.exccomp.org/News/NewsStories/sec-rules-apple-must-allow-shareholder-vote-on-executive-pay-review-similar-proposals-more-likely). 5. <http://appleinsider.com/articles/16/11/02/apple-shareholder-proposal-for-more-executive-compensation-oversight-coming-to-vote-in-2017>

I love your journal, especially the sarcasm.

— In Solidarity, Mike Jenkins



**Yours for Industrial Freedom** edited by Eric Chester. An anthology of IWW documents seized by the federal government during World War I, and previously thought to have been destroyed. Letters and other documents show the IWW grappling with many of the problems that still confront the Left today, such as the use of sabotage and reconciling a vision of a new society with the immediate demands of a movement. **\$18.95**, paper

**The Wobblies In Their Heyday** by Eric Chester. Based on extensive archival research, Chester looks at the IWW during World War I when its militant strikes drastically curtailed production in key industries, copper mining and lumber. It also examines debates within the union on how to build a broadly based movement against the war and details the coordinated repression launched by the Wilson administration to crush the Wobblies. **\$19.95**

**Oil, Wheat & Wobblies: The IWW in Oklahoma, 1905-1930.** Nigel Sellars has written a superb history of the IWW's efforts on the ground, focused upon oil and wheat workers. We see Wobbly organizing in practice, and the efforts of ordinary workers to transform their conditions and wrest some measure of control over and dignity in their lives. **\$15**, hc

**Left of the Left: My Memories of Sam Dolgoff.** A memoir by his son, Anatole. Sam Dolgoff (1902-1990) was a house painter by trade and member of the IWW from the early 1920s until his death. Sam, along with his wife Esther, was at the center of American anarchism for 70 years. This instant classic of radical history, written with passion and humor, recalls a lost NYC, the faded power of immigrant and working-class neighborhoods, and the blurred lines dividing proletarian and intellectual culture. **\$22**, paper

**The American Labor Movement: A New Beginning.** Essays by Sam Dolgoff. 2nd ed. **\$5**

**2018 Labor History Calendar.** This edition of the Solidarity Forever calendar focuses on labor struggles against bigotry and fascism. **\$12**

**The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years** by Fred Thompson and Jon Bekken. The union's official history, covering many struggles addressed nowhere else. **\$18**, paper.



# ASR

## MERCHANDISE

**Ralph Darlington, Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism.** An overview of the international syndicalist movement in the first two decades of the 20th century, looking particularly at France, Spain, Italy, the United States, Britain and Ireland. He concludes that the debates between syndicalists and Marxists remain relevant, though he tries to separate this from the authoritarian practice he sees as a later, specifically Stalinist, degeneration. Useful despite its biases. Published at \$22, now **\$12**

**Workers Control in Latin America, 1930-1979** edited by Jonathan Brown. Essays explore sugar mill seizures in Cuba, oil nationalization and rail strikes in Mexico, attempted revolution in Guatemala, railway nationalization and Peronism in Argentina, Brazil's textile strikes, the Bolivian revolution of 1952, Peru's copper strikes, and nationalization in Chile. The essays investigate everyday acts on the job and in their communities through which workers attempted to assert control over the work process. **\$12**

**Words of a Rebel** Peter Kropotkin's first book, collecting articles written for the anarchist press. **\$10**

**The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain.** A reissue of Pierre Broué and Emile Témime's classic history, one of the first to acknowledge the effort at revolution in the midst of the war against the fascist coup. Published at \$50, now **\$20**

**Anarchist Organization: History of the FAI** Juan Gomez Casas was active in the Libertarian Youth during the Spanish Revolution, and served 15 years in prison as a result of his underground activism during the Franco dictatorship. The first English-language history of the Iberian Anarchist Federation, based upon the author's first-hand knowledge of events. **\$12**

**The Russian Anarchists** by Paul Avrich This pioneering work reclaimed the anarchists' vital role in the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Covers a wide array of anarchist thinking and activity, including extensive treatment of the syndicalist movement. **\$9**

**Maurice Brinton: For Workers' Power** David Goodway edited this important collection of one of the leading advocates for self-management, including excerpts from *The Irrational in Politics*, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, and scores of essays on

revolutionary struggles old and new. **\$12**

**Cornelius Castoriadis: A Society Adrift.** Compiles interviews and essays from his last two decades exploring the chances of achieving freedom and autonomy in a world of meaningless accumulation of goods, where the mechanisms for governing society have disintegrated, our relationship with nature is reduced to one of destructive domination, and the population has withdrawn from the public sphere: a world dominated by hobbies and lobbies - a society adrift. now **\$15**

**Alexander Berkman's The Blast!** Facsimile reprint of all 29 issues of the most important American class-struggle anarchist periodical, published 1916 - 1917, when it was stopped by imprisonment and deportation. **\$10**

**Wobblies: A Graphic History of the IWW** edited by Paul Buhle & Nicole Schulman. Peter Kuper, Harvey Pekar, Seth Tobocman and others tell the history of the IWW in vignettes portraying many struggles drawn from the union's first 100 years. **\$22.50**

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